3 1761 03560 6672

THE
MYSTERIES OF THE COURT OF LONDON

VOLUME III

The Works of

George W. M. Reynolds

Rose Foster

Volume II

The Mysteries of the Court of London

Privately Printed
For Members of
The Oxford Society
London Boston

"SHE HANDED IT TO THE DUCHESS OF DEVONSHIRE"

Photogravure from original by Merrill.

"SHE HANDED IT TO THE DUCHESS OF DEVONSHIRE"
Photogravure from original by Merrill.

The Works of

George W. M. Reynolds

Rose Foster

Volume II

The Mysteries of the Court of London

Privately Printed
For Members of
The Oxford Society
London Boston

De Luxe Edition

Of this edition, printed for members of The Oxford Society, but One Thousand copies have been issued, of which this is copy

No. 560

PR
5221
R35M9
1860
V.3

LIBRARY
MAR 12 1965
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

967557

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Pauline	1
II.	Mr. Clarendon	9
III.	The Royal George	17
IV.	The Portrait	28
V.	The Outraged Nobleman and the Resuscitated Criminal	38
VI.	Rose Foster Again	45
VII.	The Friendship of Royalty	57
VIII.	The Proceedings at the Home Office	66
IX.	The Royal Lover's Victim	79
X.	A Husband's Self-martyrdom	89
XI.	Lord and Lady Holderness	102
XII.	Philanthropy — The Commencement of the Plot	113
XIII.	Caroline Walters	124
XIV.	The Prince of Wales and the Orphan	130
XV.	A Night of Blood	138
XVI.	The Prince's Dream	141
XVII.	A Strange Adventure	151
XVIII.	Evil Tidings	156
XIX.	The Examination	164
XX.	A Magnanimous Woman	173
XXI.	The Working Man's Wife and Children	181
XXII.	Who Is the Culprit?	188
XXIII.	The Private Room at the Police Office	201
XXIV.	Mrs. Brace and Mr. Peter Grumley	211
XXV.	Caroline Walters	218
XXVI.	The Revisit to the Midwife's House	229
XXVII.	Bellenden Priory	233
XXVIII.	The Amorous Constable	239

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXIX.	A Compromise	247
XXX.	The Glass of Liqueur	252
XXXI.	A Night with a Murdered Man	260
XXXII.	The Baronet and the Royal Maiden	270
XXXIII.	The Excitement and Terrors of Guilt	280
XXXIV.	The Disposal of the Corpse	289
XXXV.	The Two Noblemen	298
XXXVI.	The Beggar's Staff Again	322
XXXVII.	Rao at Earl Montgomery's Mansion	333
XXXVIII.	The Masquerade — Scene the First	342
XXXIX.	The Masquerade — Scene the Second	348
XL.	The Masquerade — Scene the Third	356
XLI.	The Heir Apparent and the Sister of His Victim	364
XLII.	The Hackney-coach and the Private Carriage	374
XLIII.	The Murderess and Her Accuser	385
XLIV.	The Boudoir of Love and Mystery	404
XLV.	The Pious Travellers	420
XLVI.	The Afflicted Maiden	437
XLVII.	The Lawyer and His Mysterious Visitress	448

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

"She handed it to the Duchess of Devonshire" (*See Page 438*) . . . . . *Frontispiece*

George, Prince of Wales 60

"Round the prince's couch did the grim and ghastly procession go" 142

Mrs. Fitzherbert 177

"She was locked in the rude embrace" 244

"And I am Pauline Clarendon" 363

THE MYSTERIES OF THE COURT OF LONDON

CHAPTER I

PAULINE

We have already stated that Pauline was too much absorbed in her own mournful reflections to notice the excited manner of her father on this memorable morning. We have also observed that when Fernanda Aylmer knocked at the door, the young maiden hurried to the window and was disappointed when she found that the arrival was not the one which she was evidently awaiting in deep suspense.

Resuming her seat upon the sofa, the beauteous Pauline gave way to her sorrowful meditations; but from time to time she looked at her watch, — that very watch which Lady Desborough had presented to her at the villa in the Edgeware Road.

At length she observed that it was midday, and the excitement of suspense and impatience was becoming intolerable.

Drawing forth a note from her bosom, she read it with attention; and the tears fell from her eyes, moistening the page with their pearly shower.

The contents of this letter were as follows:

"Carlton House, Wednesday afternoon.

"My Dear Miss Pauline: — I regret — deeply regret — to be compelled to address you upon a most unpleasant subject; but I implore you to tranquillize yourself

and listen to the good counsel which Lord Florimel will give you. Poor Octavia called upon me just now. That she was about to take this step, you were doubtless aware. Need I assure you that I received her with kindness, and that I said all I could to console her? But her excitement grew alarming, and she became very ill. Fortunately the Duchess of Devonshire arrived at the moment; and her Grace (with whom I am charmed to find that you are acquainted) volunteered to take charge of the dear girl. To this proposal I readily assented, fearful that if Octavia were conveyed home immediately, your father would inevitably discover all. The Duchess of Devonshire has therefore taken your dear sister to a secluded villa which her Grace possesses at a little distance from London; and there can be no doubt that in two or three days Octavia will be completely restored to health. The moment her Grace had departed with your sister, I sent for Lord Florimel, to whom I candidly narrated what had occurred, deeming him to be the most proper person to break the intelligence to you, and advise with you how to account to your father for Octavia's temporary absence from home. His lordship kindly and promptly undertook this task; but he requested me to pen a few lines to you, of which he offered to become the bearer. Hence this brief note.

"I should add that her Grace of Devonshire has promised to visit you on Saturday next, in the forenoon, so that she may either report to you the progress which your dear sister may be making toward complete convalescence, or else have the pleasure of restoring Octavia altogether to your arms.

"That this latter alternative may be the one which next Saturday morning will see accomplished, is a wish that comes from the heart of

"Your affectionate friend,

"GEORGE P."

Such was the letter from the Prince of Wales which Pauline Clarendon now read. As the reader may observe by the heading, it was written on the preceding Wednesday afternoon, a couple of hours after the terrible scene which occurred at Carlton House in respect to Octavia.

And why did the young lady now refer to it again? Simply to assure herself that the visit of the Duchess of Devonshire

was indeed promised for the forenoon of this Saturday on which we find her so anxiously awaiting the arrival of her Grace.

Scarcely had she read the contents of that page which in a few moments became moistened with her tears, when a carriage stopped at the door. Thrusting the letter in her bosom, Pauline hurried to the window; and a faint smile of satisfaction appeared upon her lips, as she beheld her devoted lover, Lord Florimel, descend. Another minute, and she was clasped in his arms.

"What news of Octavia, my dearest Pauline?" he demanded, leading her to a seat and placing himself by her side. Then, perceiving that her countenance bore traces of recent weeping, he exclaimed, ere she had time to reply, "Alas! nothing satisfactory, I am afraid. But tell me, Pauline, has any additional intelligence reached you?"

"None, dear Gabriel," was the answer. "You are aware that the Duchess of Devonshire was to call this morning; but it is now past midday, and she has not yet made her appearance."

"Her Grace will be sure to come, beloved girl," said Florimel, speaking in his most soothing tone and lavishing the tenderest caresses upon the charming creature on whom his affections were so devoutly fixed. "Let us hope for the best."

"Oh, I am almost wearied of indulging in hope concerning this fatal amour of my unhappy sister with the prince," exclaimed Pauline, reposing her beauteous head upon her lover's shoulder and pressing his hand in both her own. "I tremble for the consequences, Gabriel. What can I do, if her Grace should not come? Or how am I to act in the still more embarrassing position in which I shall be placed if Octavia do not return home well in health and comparatively tranquillized in mind? Must I not fly to her and offer the consolations of a sister? And yet how can I leave my father unattended by either of his daughters? Moreover, such a step on my part would probably engender suspicions in his mind —"

"But he is aware that Octavia is staying with the duchess, is he not?" inquired Florimel.

"Yes," was the answer. "He does not, however, suspect that she is ill, much less that she has anything so very

dreadful preying upon her mind. And I feel, Gabriel, as if I were playing a treacherous and false part toward my father," continued Pauline, in a tone of deep feeling and earnest sincerity. "It seems to me that I am culpable of great duplicity and falsehood in concealing from him the real truth. Nevertheless, that truth I dare not avow; for if my father's suspicions were once excited, he would pursue his inquiries and investigation until he had fathomed the whole affair in all its lamentable details. And there is another source of uneasiness which I experience," observed Pauline, after a few moments' pause; "which is, that the real extent of Octavia's illness was not made known to me. From the moment that you delivered the prince's letter into my hands last Wednesday afternoon, I have been tortured with misgivings to the effect that Octavia is worse than his Royal Highness represented. What did he tell you, Gabriel? Do you really believe that his note contained the entire truth and that nothing still more unfavourable was concealed?"

"The prince gave me precisely the same account which was contained in his letter, dear Pauline," answered Lord Florimel. "I repeated to you word for word all he said to me; but if you wish, I will tell it to you over again."

At this moment a loud double knock resounded through the house, and Pauline rushed to the window. A carriage, with a ducal coronet upon the panels, was standing at the door, and the Duchess of Devonshire immediately alighted. But she was alone, Octavia was not with her, and Pauline's heart sank with a sickening sensation in her bosom.

The duchess was conducted to the drawing-room, and thither did Pauline repair, leaning upon Florimel's arm, for a faintness was in all her limbs, and her spirit was crushed with a presentiment of evil.

"I am glad that you are here, Gabriel," were the first words which the duchess uttered, as she caught sight of the young nobleman. Then, taking Pauline's hand, she said, "My dear young friend, I shall not keep you in a state of unnecessary suspense —"

"No, no; for Heaven's sake, speak!" murmured the maiden, shuddering from head to foot. "I see that your Grace has bad news for me —"

"Alas! would that I could give you some reassuring

answer!" exclaimed the duchess, "but poor Octavia is far from well; the blow has been a cruel one."

"But she is alive?" ejaculated Pauline, in a tone of thrilling anguish, as the terrible idea flashed to her imagination that her beloved sister was no more, and that the duchess was about to break the tidings of her death as gently as possible.

"Oh, entertain not such a dreadful apprehension!" cried Georgiana, penetrating her thoughts. "Yes, Octavia is alive, thank Heaven, and well too in bodily health."

"Oh, horror! I begin to comprehend the appalling truth!" shrieked forth the wretched Pauline. "It is her reason that is affected, her senses have abandoned her! Great Heaven, I understand it all now — and your Grace does not contradict the fact. Alas! alas! my poor dear ruined sister, what has thy destroyer done to thee? What new iniquity has he perpetrated? Oh, vengeance upon his head — no, not vengeance; 'tis mercy that I implore of the prince, mercy on behalf of the ruined Octavia."

And having given utterance to these exclamations in a wild tone, and with a countenance evincing the poignancy of the anguish which rent her soul, Pauline sank upon her knees, covered her face with her hands, and burst into an uncontrollable passion of sobs and tears and bitter lamentations.

"Let her weep, Gabriel, let her weep," whispered the duchess, hastily, to the young nobleman, as he rushed forward to raise his well-beloved from that posture of despair. "This outpouring of her surcharged soul will relieve her."

And for some minutes Pauline continued to give way to her almost frantic sorrow.

But suddenly raising her head, though without moving from her knees, she looked up into Georgiana's countenance, exclaiming, "You have not told me whether my horrible suspicion be true. Perhaps I may be wrong — God grant that I am. Is my sister so deeply afflicted that she has lost her reason? Tell me, dear lady, oh, tell me. Let me know the worst, or else give me instantaneous relief by the assurance that my fears have exaggerated the evil."

And as she thus spoke, the beauteous creature twined her outstretched arms around the form of the splendid Duchess of Devonshire, every lineament of the anguished

countenance expressing the intense anxiety with which the response was awaited.

"My dear girl," said her Grace, profoundly affected, "your surmise is indeed too true. But, in the name of God, tranquillize yourself — "

"No, I cannot become tranquil," exclaimed Pauline, springing straight up like a galvanized body. "Something must now be done, a decisive course must be taken; I can deceive my father no longer. He is not at home now, but he will return presently, and then, oh, then," she added, wildly, "I shall throw myself upon my knees before him, I shall tell him all, and I shall implore his forgiveness on behalf of my poor ruined sister."

She paused, seated herself on the sofa, and appeared to reflect profoundly for upwards of a minute.

At length Lord Florimel approached her, and, taking her hand, he pressed it to his lips, saying, "My beloved Pauline, I beseech, I implore you to compose yourself. All may not be so bad as you imagine — "

"It is impossible that the aspect of my poor sister's position can be worse, Gabriel," interrupted the young maiden, in a tone of profound feeling; and then followed another outburst of indescribable anguish.

"Listen to me, my sweet young friend," said the Duchess of Devonshire, when the violence of this new paroxysm of Pauline's affliction had somewhat subsided; and placing herself by the young lady's side on the sofa, Georgiana took her hand with every demonstration of affection, observing, "You are endowed, Pauline, with a strong mind and excellent sense, and I am certain that you will look this misfortune courageously in the face. For that any harm which happens to your sister becomes a misfortune to yourself, I am well aware, so great is the affection existing between you both. But what course does prudence now recommend? That the veil of secrecy shall be drawn as completely as possible around this lamentable occurrence, and that the world shall not be suffered to learn the real cause of Octavia's affliction. She is now in a comfortable retirement, surrounded by all the gentle ministrations and affectionate attentions which friendship can suggest and which her position demands. An eminent medical practitioner devotes himself to her cure; and he last evening declared to me most

solemnly that in a few weeks' time her reason will be re-established, provided his regimen receive no hindrance nor interruption. It would, therefore, be imprudent, my dear Pauline, to think of visiting your sister at present. As for cherishing sentiments of vindictiveness against the Prince of Wales, your own good sense will show you how useless and ineffectual such a project must prove, while its only result would be to proclaim to the world your beloved sister's dishonour. Respecting your father, my dear Pauline," continued the duchess, her tone becoming more tender and soothing as she proceeded, " I will myself undertake to communicate the distressing intelligence to him; and I will guarantee that he shall pardon his afflicted daughter, pardon you also for having in any respect withholden from him the truth."

" Her Grace speaks fairly and kindly, Pauline," said Lord Florimel; " and you will do well to leave the matter entirely in her hands."

" Yes, I will follow your advice, dear Gabriel," returned the young maiden; " and to your ladyship," she added, addressing herself to Georgiana, " my eternal gratitude is due for all the generous interest you have taken and are still taking in this lamentable affair. But tell me about my dear sister: is she melancholy or excited, and where is she? "

" Octavia is at a charming little villa which I possess in Buckinghamshire, at no considerable distance from Aylesbury," replied the duchess. " Respecting the state of her mind, I must inform you that there are times when she is dreadfully excited, and others at which she falls into a black despair."

" Poor Octavia! " murmured Pauline, the tears streaming down her cheeks, and her lovely bosom heaving with the sobs which half-choked her.

" But as I have before stated," continued Georgiana, " she is under the charge not only of kind attendants, but likewise of a skilful physician; and you may be assured, my sweet young friend, that the moment Doctor Clarges gives his permission for you to visit her, I will myself come and fetch you in my carriage for that purpose."

In this manner did the Duchess of Devonshire and Lord Florimel exert themselves to soothe the afflicted mind of the younger Miss Clarendon; and in the course of an hour

she became considerably tranquillized. They were then all enabled to converse more calmly and seriously upon the unhappy event which had occasioned Pauline so much sorrow; and the Duchess of Devonshire took an opportunity to hint that she was the bearer of such good tidings for Mr. Clarendon in one sense that he would be partially consoled for the evil intelligence awaiting him in another.

Thus did three hours pass away; and the timepiece on the mantel was striking four, when a hackney-coach drove up to the front door, and Mr. Clarendon alighted.

But instead of immediately entering the house, he turned to hand a lady from the vehicle; and this fair companion, taking his arm, passed into the dwelling with him.

Another minute, and the drawing-room door being thrown open, Mr. Clarendon and Fernanda appeared upon the threshold; and the former, leading his companion toward Pauline, said, " My dear child, this lady has consented to ensure my happiness by becoming my wife. It is for you to welcome her to that home over which she will henceforth preside with the dignity, grace, and kindness natural to her character."

CHAPTER II

MR. CLARENDON

It would be impossible to describe the astonishment, amounting to a positive shock, which Pauline experienced as this strange announcement fell upon her ears. The colour forsook her cheeks, and she stood motionless and pale as a statue, her eyes fixed vacantly upon Fernanda. Then a crimson glow suddenly suffused her countenance, her bosom rose and fell rapidly, and her looks settled upon her father's features, as if to read the truth therein and convince herself that she was not being made the victim of a heartless joke or cruel mockery.

To Fernanda this scene, brief though it were, was far from agreeable, especially as she immediately recognized the Duchess of Devonshire and Lord Florimel, with both of whom she was acquainted; but, with characteristic self-possession and firmness, she took Pauline's hand, saying, "Have you no congratulations to offer to your father, if not to me? But we shall be friends, very good friends, dear girl, when you come to know me well."

These words recalled the maiden to a sense of the necessity of demonstrating her obedience toward her parent's wishes, as well as her respect for the choice which he had made and the step which he had taken. She accordingly endeavoured to make a suitable reply to Fernanda's speech and give utterance to some words of welcome and congratulation; but the thought suddenly flashed to her mind that while her father was bringing home a young and beauteous bride, her sister was suffering under the most cruel affliction. A torrent of tears choked her utterance, and, staggering back a few paces, she would have fallen heavily, had not Lord Florimel caught her in his arms and supported her to the sofa.

Mr. Clarendon's countenance became black with displeasure, and Fernanda turned white and red a dozen times in half a minute.

But the Duchess of Devonshire hastened to approach them, and, taking the hand of the latter, said, "My dear friend, I congratulate you, most sincerely congratulate you, upon the alliance which you have formed, as I have not the slightest doubt that you have therein consulted your own happiness. Being an old friend of your aunt, Lady Desborough, I am naturally interested in your welfare; and I therefore rejoice that accident should have led to my being here so opportunely to offer my felicitations. You will present me to Mr. Clarendon, Fernanda," added her Grace, with a sweet smile.

The introduction took place; and the duchess hastened to say, as she glanced toward Pauline, "Mr. Clarendon, you must not misinterpret your daughter's feelings. She is too good, dutiful, and affectionate a girl not to be contented and satisfied with any step which you may take to ensure your own happiness; and therefore the embarrassment which she evinced at first and the emotions which she is experiencing now must not be attributed to a wrong cause. The truth is, Mr. Clarendon," added Georgiana, "she has this afternoon received intelligence that is only too well calculated to afflict her; and circumstances rendered me the unwilling bearer of these evil tidings."

"Evil tidings!" ejaculated Mr. Clarendon, throwing a glance of anxious inquiry upon the countenance of the Duchess of Devonshire.

"Alas! it is too true," replied her Grace; "and these tidings equally regard you. But I have likewise some welcome intelligence to impart; and therefore I must crave a few minutes' interview with you alone."

Mr. Clarendon glanced toward his bride to see what effect these mysterious words on the part of the duchess produced upon her; and it instantaneously struck the shrewd and far-seeing Georgiana that the favourable portion of what she had to communicate would materially please, as indeed it now materially interested Fernanda in her capacity as Mr. Clarendon's wife.

With admirable tact and judgment, therefore, did the Duchess of Devonshire hasten to observe, "When I say that

I request an interview with you alone, Mr. Clarendon, I do not mean to exclude your fair bride from our conference."

Fernanda's countenance now brightened up; and Mr. Clarendon led the way to an adjacent apartment, Lord Florimel being thus left to console his well-beloved Pauline in the drawing-room.

"I have already hinted," said the Duchess of Devonshire, when she was alone with Mr. and Mrs. Clarendon, "that the nature of the communications which I have to make is two-fold. On one side there is a great calamity, on the other an amazing piece of good fortune. I will not, however, insult you, Mr. Clarendon, by intimating that the latter will entirely compensate for the former; but as you are a man of the world and doubtless entertain that laudable ambition which animates the breasts of all human creatures, you will doubtless perceive in the favourable tidings a certain atonement as well as solace for the evil intelligence."

"I beseech your Grace to explain yourself at once," said Mr. Clarendon, trembling all over with nervous anxiety and suspense.

"In the first place," continued the duchess, "you must prepare to hear unpleasant news respecting your elder daughter, Octavia."

"Ah! what of her?" ejaculated Clarendon, the feelings of a father suddenly vibrating painfully to the ominous sound of words which appeared to herald the revelation of a misfortune.

"Your daughter, your elder daughter, the lovely and fascinating Octavia," said the duchess, solemnly, "has been seduced."

"Impossible!" cried the wretched man, bounding upon his chair as if a bullet had penetrated his heart. "She is virtue itself."

"Alas! alas!" exclaimed Georgiana, "her virtue has yielded to the influence of love and temptation."

"Maledictions upon the man who has blighted that fair flower!" thundered forth the enraged father, springing from his seat and gesticulating with awful vehemence.

"Stay! stay!" cried Georgiana, catching him by the arm. "He who has thus deeply injured you in one sense has vouchsafed a royal act of bounty in another."

"A royal act!" repeated Clarendon, catching at the

word which seemed to afford an instantaneous clue to the solution of the mystery that was connected with his daughter's shame. "What am I to understand from your Grace's observation? Has royalty so far honoured me as to debauch my daughter?" he demanded, with a laugh of almost maniac bitterness.

"Cease this useless excitement," said Fernanda, "and let us hear what atonement is offered. For that reparation of some kind is intended for the injury thus done you in the person of your daughter, is evident from the language of her Grace."

"Atonement — reparation!" murmured Mr. Clarendon, sinking down into his seat again. "Well, let us hear it! May it please your Grace to continue," he observed, half-ironically, as he threw a wild glance upon the Duchess of Devonshire.

"I pray you to look upon me as a messenger of peace and conciliation," said Georgiana, stifling the resentment which rose up in her bosom at Mr. Clarendon's ungracious manner. "Your daughter Octavia had the misfortune to attract the notice of the Prince of Wales, and in a moment of love and passion he triumphed over her virtue. But unfortunately the calamity does not end there. On Wednesday last Octavia sought an interview with her royal lover, and the excitement of the scene which ensued has temporarily impaired her reason."

"Holy God! what do I hear?" exclaimed the unhappy father, once more springing from his seat.

"My lord, I implore your lordship to be calm and composed," said the Duchess of Devonshire, in a tone of suitable significancy.

"Ah! what do I hear?" ejaculated Mr. Clarendon, turning toward her Grace with an abrupt start. "Was it to me that those sounding titles were addressed?"

"To whom else could I have spoken?" asked Georgiana, with a sweet smile. "I have revealed to you the injury, and I now proclaim the atonement. The prince has inflicted the wound, and to the extent of his power he administers the anodyne. Permit me, then, to congratulate your lordship upon your elevation to the peerage; and here is the patent of nobility which confers upon you the title of Baron Holderness."

The newly created peer received the parchment from the hands of the beautiful Duchess of Devonshire; but he took it mechanically, staring upon her vacantly at the same time. It was evident that he could not believe his own ears, nor dared to trust his own eyes; he fancied that he was dreaming, and feared to utter even a word or make an abrupt movement lest he should awake and thereby dissipate the golden vision.

But Fernanda snatched away the parchment, tore it open, and was in a moment convinced that the Duchess of Devonshire had indeed spoken truly. The patent of nobility was drawn up in due form, and conferred upon Walter Octavius Clarendon, Esquire, the style and title of Baron Lord Holderness to be had and held by himself and male heirs so long as his posterity should exist. A document on foolscap paper was annexed to the patent; and the hasty glance which Fernanda threw over the former showed that the peerage was accompanied by the grant of a pension of two thousand pounds a year, " for services rendered at divers times and in sundry manners to the sovereigns of these realms by the ancestors of the said Walter Octavius Clarendon, Baron Holderness, and likewise to enable him to maintain the dignity of his peerage."

A glow of mingled pride and joy suffused the countenance of Fernanda; and her husband, observing the animated expression of her features, no longer remained skeptical with regard to his good fortune. Taking the papers from her hand, he perused them with attention; and by degrees, as he read, the colour came to his sallow cheeks, the light of ineffable satisfaction and triumph gleamed in his eyes, his nostrils dilated, his chest expanded, and a thrill of ecstasy passed over his frame as he felt that the object of all his ambition was suddenly and most unexpectedly attained.

Forgotten was Octavia, unheeded now were her wrongs; and, elate with boundless satisfaction, the newly made peer expressed his gratitude to the Duchess of Devonshire for having been the bearer of the welcome tidings which now alone engrossed his attention. Turning toward Fernanda, he saluted her by the name of Lady Holderness, and embraced her as fervently as if they had been courting for years and had married through love. Then, flinging open

the door and holding the papers in his hand, he hurried to the drawing-room to announce his good fortune to his younger daughter, and inform her that she was now the Honourable Miss Pauline Clarendon.

The young lady was seated upon the sofa in earnest conversation with Lord Florimel, when her father burst into the room.

"My dear child," he exclaimed, running up to her and catching her in his arms, "congratulate me! I am now one of England's peers, no longer the obscure and humble Mr. Clarendon, dependent on the bounty of a haughty relative, but Lord Holderness, with two thousand a year. Congratulate me, I say, dear Pauline."

But the young maiden withdrew herself abruptly, and even violently, from her father's arms; and, surveying him for a few moments with a troubled countenance and a swelling bosom, she said, "Is it possible you can rejoice to-day after all that the Duchess of Devonshire must have revealed to you?"

Then back to the memory of Lord Holderness flashed the remembrance of his ruined and demented daughter; and, while a sudden pallor swept over his countenance, he staggered back a pace or two as if he were about to fall. But almost instantly recovering himself, he exclaimed, "Oh, our dear Octavia's secret shall be hushed up, and with kind treatment she will soon regain her mental equilibrium. We must not be hard upon the prince; he is not to be judged by the same rules to which ordinary men are subject, and besides has he not done all that lies in his power to make reparation and atonement?"

"Oh, my dear father," cried Pauline, in a rending tone of anguish, "can you find consolation in such wretched sophistry as this? Here on my knees, before you," she exclaimed, sinking down at his feet and joining her hands beseechingly, "do I call upon you to reject with scorn the bauble that has been offered as a recompense for the ruined honour of your elder daughter. Oh, I can understand it all, this peerage and this pension —"

"Silence, child!" ejaculated Lord Holderness. "It is for me to judge what I ought to accept or refuse, and not for you to dictate. Rise, I command you, and let me have no more of this puling sentimentalism."

For a few moments Pauline remained like a kneeling statue, transfixed and paralyzed with the shock occasioned by her father's language. Her upraised countenance, pale as marble, denoted amazement blended with terror and grief; and her arms remained outstretched to their full length, the hands being joined.

But suddenly her cheeks flushed and her eyes flashed fire in a manner never seen before with respect to her; and, rising hastily from her suppliant posture, she said, in a low, thick voice, " Father, am I to understand that you accept this peerage and this pension as the recompense for our Octavia's dishonour? "

" Silence, child, I command you to be silent! " exclaimed Lord Holderness, his countenance growing livid with rage.

" Then this house is no longer a home for me," said Pauline, her features once more becoming ghastly pale, her whole form quivering with the strong spasms that shot through her heart, but her voice, nevertheless, indicating the firmness of a heroine and the self-devotion of a martyr. " Farewell, father, farewell! Not for worlds would I bask in the sunshine of that coronet which has been thus ignobly purchased; not to save myself from starvation would I eat a morsel of bread bought with the pension given as a reward for my poor dear sister's ruin. Farewell, father; I will pray for you morning and night, as heretofore, but your house can no longer be my home."

She paused for a few moments, and cast a rapid look around. In the features of Florimel she read the rapture of that admiration and worship which her noble conduct excited in his soul; in the countenance of the duchess she observed an expression of approval which her Grace could not subdue. But she saw that her father was dogged and morose; while his newly wedded wife, Lady Holderness, stood by his side darting fierce and implacable glances upon the heroic maiden.

Then Pauline, advancing toward the Duchess of Devonshire, said, in a tone of mingled confidence and entreaty, " Your Grace will afford me an asylum for a few hours until I can repair to the abode of my sister? "

" Ponder, reflect, Pauline," exclaimed Georgiana; " think of the step you are taking."

" Then you refuse me an asylum? " said the young maiden,

turning away; and as her eyes filled with tears, she was about to address herself to Lord Florimel, when the duchess, who was naturally of unbounded generosity, caught her in her arms and embraced her tenderly.

" Yes, come with me, dear Pauline," exclaimed Georgiana; " and not only for a few hours, but for days and weeks and years may you command a home beneath my roof."

" A thousand thanks! " murmured Pauline, bursting into tears. " One moment, and I shall be with you."

And she hurried away to her own chamber, to put on her bonnet and scarf.

But as she was about to quit the drawing-room, Lord Holderness stretched out his hand to retain her, for his heart suddenly gave way at the thought of losing his youngest born thus.

" Let the wilful girl have her own way," said Fernanda, sharply, as she caught hold of her husband's arm and drew it back.

And Lord Holderness made not another effort to induce Pauline to alter her determination.

Two minutes elapsed, during which not a word was spoken in the drawing-room.

At the expiration of that time a servant entered, and addressing himself to the duchess, said, " Miss Clarendon is already seated in your Grace's carriage."

Florimel and Georgiana accordingly took their leave of Lord and Lady Holderness; and the newly made peer, deprived of both his daughters, was left alone with his bride, — that snake with the lovely skin.

CHAPTER III

THE ROYAL GEORGE

TEN days had elapsed since the Magsman and Big Beggarman embarked on board the brig in the Mersey, and during that interval the ship had pursued its way toward the western hemisphere.

At first a favourable wind and tolerably fine weather had attended upon the course of the *Royal George*, and thus for a week considerable progress had been made in the voyage. But a change then took place: the steady breeze broke into fitful gusts of violent fury, the heavens grew black and menacing, the ocean rolled in dark and sombre waves, and every sign familiar to the seaman's experience denoted the coming storm.

Over the surface of the troubled main swept the screaming bird; and on the tenth evening the sun went down a deep blood-red colour, like a lamp of evil omen extinguishing beneath the mighty arch of heaven which now overhung the boundless ocean like a tremendous sheet of lead.

In the captain's cabin the Magsman and the Big Beggarman were seated at the table, upon which stood the drinking materials, that were prevented from falling off by a rim running above the surface all around the board; for the vessel was now tossing up and down on the undulating bosom of the Atlantic.

A lamp was suspended to the ceiling of the cabin; but through the stern windows the white crests of the billows could be discerned, like moving masses of snow gleaming in the obscurity, and from time to time the spray dashed against the thick glass.

The rapid trampling of the sailors upon deck, the responses which they gave to the commands which the

captain thundered forth, the rattling of the cordage, the shaking of masts and spars, the frequent fluttering of the sails, the din of the rudder beating occasionally against the stern of the vessel, the tremendous oscillation of the tiller, the straining of the timbers from one end of the vessel to the other, the changing voices in which the gale spoke, now dull, low, and mournful, as if with subdued moanings, then loud, bursting, gushing, roaring, raging, as it swept over the Atlantic, — these were the sounds which fell upon the ears of the two men as they sat smoking, drinking, and conversing alone together in the cabin.

And although their discourse was of a private and particular nature, no necessity was there to speak in whispers; for so great was the din without — in the ship, upon the ocean, and in the air — that there were intervals when the two men could not hear themselves speak; and thus, even if a listener had been stationed on the other side of the door, with his ear to the panels, he could not have overheard a syllable that was uttered in that cabin.

It was now about eight o'clock on this memorable evening, and the anger of the storm was rapidly increasing to a perfect fury.

But, comparatively unmoved by the elemental war, the Magsman and the Big Beggarman were deliberately digesting projects well suited to the appalling nature of the night that was heralded by a blood-red sunset and an evening of tempestuous heavens.

" Well, then, you're decided on doing it without any unnecessary delay? " said the Big Beggarman, as he refilled his pipe and pressed down the tobacco with his thumb.

" This very night, Stephen," responded the Magsman. " There's no use in waiting any longer, and since our plans are pretty well decided on — "

Here the gale drowned the remainder of his sentence.

" Now let us look the whole thing calmly and coolly in the face once more," said the Big Beggarman, after a long pause, " so that we may calculate all the chances that's for us and all that's against us."

" Good! " exclaimed Joe Warren; " there's nothing like holding a proper council of war. In the first place, then, we must reflect that you and me are only two on one side against the captain and nine men on the other."

"That's two against ten," observed the Big Beggarman, gloomily.

"And ten strong, sturdy fellers that don't know what fear is," added Joe Warren. "But this is only the dark side of the picture. The light side is more flattering than t'other is discouraging. In the first place, we must make away with the captain."

"That's easy enow," observed the Beggarman. "He has quite lost all his mistrust of us, and by waiting so patiently before we made up our minds to do anything or take any step, we've quite lulled asleep any suspicion that he might have entertained."

"You're right there, Stephen," responded the Magsman. "That he did look upon us in a very queer fashion at the beginning, is very certain, or else he wouldn't have made us give up our pistols the first night we were on board the ship. But by degrees his fears wore off, and then he let us go upon deck the second day and chat with the sailors. Well, our first move, as we were saying, is to make away with him; and then we must serve the chief mate in the same manner. That's not impossible to be done, as I explained to you yesterday."

"But then we shall have eight sturdy mariners to deal with," said the Beggarman.

"They'll be paralyzed when we tell them what we've done and what we mean to do," rejoined Warren, in a tone of desperate ferocity. "After all," he continued, at the expiration of a few minutes, during which a tremendous gust swept over the ocean and the vessel went careering down into the abyss like a maddened race-horse, then up the mighty steep of waters again at a far slower rate, "after all, we ain't the men to stand upon trifles, Stephen, and if it comes to the scratch, we must fight a bloody battle, even though the odds will be eight to two when the captain and first mate are put out of the way."

"Ay, it won't come to such a desperate combat, when we think calmly of the business," said the Big Beggarman. "The men will knock under as soon as they see that their chief officers are gone and that we're resolute. Besides, the hope of plunder and the excitement of the new kind of life which we shall propose to them — "

"That's the very point which I rely upon," ejaculated

the Magsman. "But let us still look at the worst. With arms in our hands, friend Stephen, there ain't two more formidable fellers on the face of this earth than we are — "

"Well, I rather think not," interrupted the Beggarman, complacently. "And as to getting the weapons to use in case of necessity, there won't be much difficulty on that score, for the captain always carries pistols secreted about him. That we know for a certainty."

"And there's always half a dozen cutlasses on deck, around the foot of the mainmast," added the Magsman; "for though the captain's suspicions have been lulled asleep, as you observed just now, he hasn't omitted the necessary precautions in case we should suddenly show our teeth. But his precautions will be our safeguard: that is to say, we shall know where to lay our hands upon weapons at the proper moment. After all said and done, I sha'n't be sorry, in the long run, that the nobleman, whoever he was, played us this infernal trick. The first night we came on board, when I opened the letter which I expected was to contain bank-notes for the fifteen hundred due to me, I was cursedly savage to find that it was a bill payable in New York only."

"And I wasn't best pleased when I opened my letter at the same time and found the same thing," observed the Beggarman. "It was a deuced good plant to compel us to go out to America and reconcile us to our fate in that respect. But we've hit upon a plan that'll upset all the nobleman's fine schemes," added the ruffian, with a horrible chuckle.

"I should think so indeed," exclaimed the Magsman. "We'll not only get our fifteen hundred pounds each in New York, but we'll also get the ship and everything in her. The cargo must be worth some thousands. And, therefore, as I was saying just now, I'm not so particularly sorry, after all, that his unknown lordship has tried this plant upon us. Had we received our money in good bank-notes upon coming on board, and if no restraint had been put upon us, we should have quietly left the ship again and stepped back on British ground, contented with the cash we'd realized. But now the treachery practised toward us has instigated us to treachery likewise, and there's more than one person that'll be made to rue the — "

Here the Magsman's voice was drowned in the roar of the

tempest, which increased a thousandfold all the terrible noises that we have enumerated above.

But soon after the rage of that tremendous gust had spent itself, there was a long interval of comparative lull; and, the door of the cabin suddenly opening, the captain of the vessel made his appearance.

His rough garments were shining with the spray which had dashed over him, the water dropped from the wide brim of the low glazed hat which he had substituted for his cap with the gold-lace band, and his dripping hair hung lanky and straight over his ears. His countenance was more rubicund than ever; and his aspect altogether was that of the weather-beaten, sturdy tar to whom storms were familiar and tempests a source of not unpleasurable excitement.

"Well, my hearties," he exclaimed, in a voice which was hoarse and thick from the effects of bawling out his orders upon the deck amidst the din of the elements, "you manage to make yourselves pretty comfortable, eh? That's all right, and I thought I'd just step down to see how you was both getting on. It blows great guns, by jingo!"

"Won't it be a nasty night, captain?" demanded the Magsman.

"Rough enow," was the laconic response, as the captain shook himself like a dog just emerged from the water. "But there's nothin' to fear, my hearties," he added, at the expiration of a few moments. "A good ship and plenty of sea-room — that's all one wants to make everything safe and trim."

"You'll take a dram, captain, eh?" said the Big Beggarman.

"Just to keep the cold out," observed Joe Warren. "Come, sit down there, and I'll mix a stinger for you."

"Well, I don't mind staying a minute or two with you," returned the skipper, taking the seat which the Magsman officiously vacated for his accommodation. Then, pulling off his hat and unbuttoning his heavy pea-jacket, he said, "This is the eleventh voyage I've made in this here boat across the Atlantic without any mishap, and so I'll drink success to the present wentur'."

"And we'll all jine in," observed the Big Beggarman, catching the rapid glance of terrible significancy which the Magsman at the same moment darted upon him.

"Well, here's success, then," said the captain, raising to his lips the tumbler which Joe Warren had filled with grog for his behoof.

"I shall drink that toast in a bumper," exclaimed the Beggarman, helping himself to a copious supply of the rum.

"And so will I," said the Magsman, receiving the bottle from his friend's hand.

But, quick as thought, and as if suddenly obeying a galvanic impulse, Joe Warren grasped the bottle by the neck and raised it above his head as if it were a short club. The captain perceived the movement in an instant, saw the intended treachery, and sprang to his feet, thus encountering, as it were, half-way the tremendous blow which the ruffian dealt him with the bottle. Crash it descended upon the seaman's head, and into a thousand pieces it flew. A cry burst from the victim's lips as he staggered back, the blood pouring down his face and blinding him with its sanguine flood; and, although half-stunned, he mechanically thrust one hand into the inner pocket of his pea-jacket to clutch a pistol.

But, like a tiger springing upon its prey from the thicket of an Indian jungle, or as the boa-constrictor flings itself from a bough on the traveller passing beneath, did the Magsman rush upon the doomed mariner. Down they fell together, a savage growl escaping from Joe Warren's breast; and at the same moment the Big Beggarman, falling on his knees, fixed his iron grasp upon the captain's throat.

Like two demons did the murderers appear as they did their awful work, one keeping the victim down, despite of his desperate struggles and agonized writhings, the other throttling him in his savage gripe; the former gnashing his teeth and foaming at the mouth with the ferocious excitement of the deed, the latter with compressed lips and corrugated brows indicating all the tremendous power of the muscular energy which his entire frame furnished to accomplish the task of strangulation.

And in the meantime the roar of the tempest had recommenced, and the terrors of the storm were added to the horrors of that foul iniquity.

'Twas done, and the captain lay lifeless on the cabin-floor, his countenance livid and blue, his eyes starting from their bloody sockets.

Springing to their feet when they were assured that the death-struggle was ended, the two murderers took possession of their victim's pistols. Then they opened one of the stern-windows, and, raising the corpse between them, they thrust it forth into the ocean, which was now lashing itself up into foaming fury. The waters sucked in the dead body, and at the same instant a tremendous wave beat against the stern of the vessel. To draw down the wooden lids protecting the ports in which the windows were set was now the work of a few moments with the Magsman and the Big Beggarman; and having done this, their eyes met with looks of savage triumph, as they saw in the assassination of the captain the accomplishment of the first and most important step in their grand nefarious scheme.

"Now, Stephen," said the Magsman, as he examined the priming of the pistols and assured himself that it was quite dry, the great rough coat of the captain having effectually defended the weapons from the spray which had beaten over their owner when he was alive and performing his duty upon the deck, "now, Stephen, you must go up above and play your part, as already agreed on."

"I understand, old feller," responded the Big Beggarman, putting on his hat as firmly as possible so as to encounter the fury of the gale. Then, having tossed off a dram of raw spirit, he quitted the cabin, closing the door behind him.

On ascending to the deck, the atmosphere was at first so dark that the Big Beggarman could distinguish nothing: all seemed black as if the air were a solid mass of pitch. But in a few moments his eyes began to grow accustomed to that dense obscurity, and the masts, spars, and cordage gradually stood out in lines of jet against the inky sky. The forms of the seamen appeared like black objects of uncouth shape, and the bulwarks of the vessel stretched forward on either side until they seemed lost in the darkness at the farther extremity.

The wind was howling, sweeping, and roaring in all the variations of its voice of terror; the spray beat over the deck, and the motion of the ship was so great that the Big Beggarman would have speedily lost his balance had he not in the first instance clung to a rope, and then made a rush, as it were, to the mainmast.

Unobserved by the sailors, who were bustling about performing the orders issued from the lips of the first mate,

the Big Beggarman hastily secured under his coat all the cutlasses which were kept in a rack upon the after-deck. He then availed himself of a temporary lull in the hurricane to make his way up to the spot where the chief mate was standing, and, in a tone of apparent frankness and haste, he said, " The captain has been taken suddenly ill down in the cabin, sir, and wants to speak to you directly."

" The deuce! what's the matter with him? " demanded the chief mate.

" He was seized with a shivering all over and fell down in a sort of fit," was the Big Beggarman's ready response. " But he's rallied a little, by having rum poured down his throat, and now he wants to speak to you."

The mate, totally unsuspicious of treachery, instantly summoned Mr. Watkins, a subordinate officer, whom he ordered to take charge of the ship for a few minutes; and he then hastened down the companion-ladder, the Big Beggarman following close behind him. Opening the door, he entered the cabin; but scarcely had he crossed the threshold when he was knocked down by a huge bludgeon which the Magsman had obtained by breaking off the leg of a stool. The Big Beggarman rushed in, shut the door behind him, and, drawing a cutlass, made a desperate sweep with the trenchant blade at the unfortunate officer as he was starting up from the floor. A yell of agony rang from the victim's lips, a yell which reached not the ears of those on deck, or, if it did, was mistaken for one of the thousand tones in which the voice of the tempest speaks upon the ocean. But even before that appalling sound had ceased to vibrate on the ears of the murderers in the cabin, their terrible work was accomplished, the deed was done, and the mate became the second victim of the tremendous tragedy of this night of horrors.

From one of the stern-windows the gory corpse was thrust into the ocean, and once more did the assassins exchange looks of ferocious satisfaction and diabolical triumph.

But now came the most hazardous portion of their enterprise, — a crisis which must decide the attitude that the crew would take toward them. Still the miscreants quailed not in the presence of the danger which they were incurring; but enhancing their natural courage by means of the artificial stimulant supplied by the burning alcohol which they poured

copiously down their throats, they prepared for the worst with an undaunted energy worthy of a better cause.

Each arming himself with a drawn cutlass and a loaded pistol, and having secreted the other swords in the bedding of one of their cots, so that those weapons should not at least become immediately available to the sailors, the Magsman and the Big Beggarman ascended to the deck.

Watkins, the second mate, who had been left in charge of the ship, was standing close by the man at the wheel; and the other sailors were distributed about in different parts of the vessel, according to the nature of the duties which they were at the moment called upon to perform.

The instant Joe Warren and the Beggarman put their feet upon the deck, they hastily accosted the second mate and the steersman; and presenting their pistols, exclaimed, "Dare to move from your posts and we will blow your brains out. Silence, speak not a word, and your lives shall be spared."

The suddenness of a proceeding so utterly unexpected, the determined manner in which the two ruffians spoke, and the cold contact of the muzzles of the pistols against the foreheads of Watkins and the steersman so completely astounded these individuals that the injunction of silence was in reality perfectly unnecessary: terror and amazement had already sealed their lips.

"One word is as good as twenty," said Joe Warren, now acting as spokesman. "The truth is, then, that we have made away with the captain and the first mate, and we mean to take possession of the ship, or die in the attempt. If you fall into our views, well and good. We'll sell the cargo first, share the spoil, and then hoist the black flag and turn pirates. But if you resist, we'll continue the bloody work that's already begun, by murdering you both. Now what say you?"

"Who's to command the ship?" inquired Watkins, who had by this time recovered his presence of mind and who now spoke with promptitude and decision.

"You shall be the captain," answered the Magsman, — "on particular conditions; and Bradley, the steersman, shall be first mate. Now, then, speak, what say you?"

"I agree," returned Watkins, unhesitatingly.

"And so do I," said the helmsman, whose name was Bradley.

"You both swear most solemnly that you fall into our views?" demanded the Magsman.

"We swear," was the resolute and firm response.

"All right!" exclaimed the Magsman, withdrawing his pistol from its menacing vicinage to the head of Watkins, while the Big Beggarman simultaneously released Bradley from the like state of jeopardy.

The scene which we have just related scarcely occupied two minutes. The action was prompt, the discourse was rapid, brief, and to the point, and the understanding was therefore speedily come to and settled. None of the other sailors had overheard the conversation or noticed that anything unusual was going forward; for, in the first place, they were too far off to be within ear-shot of the words spoken on the after-part of the deck, especially in the midst of a roaring sea and a gushing hurricane, and, secondly, the night was much too dark to permit them to catch even a glimpse of the naked cutlasses or the pistols which the two murderers wielded. There were thus six more men in the ship to win over by fair means or coerce by foul, and Joe Warren did not doubt a successful issue to the adventure in either case.

"Now summon three of the men, captain," he said to Watkins, "and tell them what has occurred."

This order was instantly obeyed; and the three sailors whom Watkins called aft heard, with mingled feelings of terror and surprise, that a mutiny had taken place on board, that their legitimate commander and first mate had been murdered, and that their adhesion was required to the new condition of things, under peril of their own lives. Two of them, influenced by the promises made and the hopes held out, instantaneously signified their assent, while fear induced the third to adopt a similar course. They were then ordered to stand aside, while the remaining three sailors were summoned in their turn to receive the startling communication of all that had occurred on board within the previous quarter of an hour; and the result was completely satisfactory to the Magsman and the Big Beggarman.

Copious allowances of spirits were now dealt around, and the tragic mutiny was succeeded by boisterous hilarity on board of the *Royal George*.

But still the storm continued; the wind swept in tremendous gusts over the Atlantic, whose bosom was upheaved into waves that ran mountains high, and presently the lightning flashed forth in vivid brilliancy, and the thunder rolled with a crashing din, as if a thousand chariots were tearing along a brazen bridge.

CHAPTER IV

THE PORTRAIT

We now return to the Countess of Desborough, that charming, beautiful, and strong-minded woman, whose passions were, however, more potent than her reason, and whose temperament had plunged her, after many, many successful struggles against temptation, into the vortex of love's voluptuous enjoyments.

For the attachment which she cherished toward Ramsey amounted to a fervent enthusiasm that would have conducted her all-smiling to the stake, had it been necessary to die for him, — a love not only arising from a sense of his manly beauty and from the happiness enjoyed in the burning moments of sensual delight, but also from admiration of those graces of manner and intellect which so preëminently characterized the resuscitated convict.

Three weeks had elapsed since accident first threw in her way the man whom she knew only as Gustavus Wakefield, and a fortnight had now passed since she surrendered herself to his arms. During this period her love had become enhanced into a frenzy, and her husband must have been perfectly blind if he had not perceived the worship with which his beauteous Eleanor regarded their guest. But she had never once paused to reflect whether her conduct were not calculated to excite her husband's suspicions. Yielding to the torrent of pleasure and ecstasy that bore her soul along and bathed her senses in a tide of unutterable bliss, she had no thought for anything save this delirious dream of delight, no consideration for any one save the man who had thus suddenly become the emperor of her heart.

It will be remembered that Fernanda Aylmer returned to her uncle's mansion immediately after the failure of the

midnight attempt which she made to poison Arthur Eaton, on that occasion when William Dudley introduced her to his young master's apartment; but, having remained for a few days beneath the roof of her noble relatives, Fernanda departed suddenly, with the avowed intention of visiting the earl's seat in Derbyshire. It was on the morning of the very day when his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales dined with Lord and Lady Desborough that Fernanda had thus quitted the mansion in Berkeley Square; and from that time her relatives had heard little concerning her, until the astounding intelligence was conveyed to them, by means of a hurried note which she had written, that she had become the wife of Mr. Clarendon, or rather, Lord Holderness.

The Earl of Desborough, when he began to reflect calmly upon the matter, was not sorry that his wayward, volatile, and perverse tempered niece had thus settled herself in life, and at all events formed an honourable connection; and he could not help thinking that Arthur Eaton had experienced a somewhat fortunate escape in being refused by a young lady of so strange, wild, and self-willed a disposition. As for the Countess of Desborough, she was too much absorbed in her passion for Ramsey to devote many minutes' thought to Fernanda; and, moreover, on the Saturday evening when the tidings of the young lady's marriage reached Berkeley Square, Eleanor was completely wrapped up in the enjoyment of her lover's society after an absence of three days on his part.

For our readers will remember that on the previous Thursday night Ramsey had appeared to Mr. and Mrs. Page in the library at Stamford Manor; and that visit to the neighbourhood of Aylesbury had certain objects which will transpire hereafter.

On the Saturday evening he came back to Berkeley Square, — his departure and his return both taking place at dusk, when his countenance might be effectually concealed by the shadow of his hat and the collar of his cloak. But need we say that in the meantime his absence had appeared an age to the enamoured Eleanor, and the three days had seemed as many centuries? All the next day she remained at home, on purpose to enjoy his society, the excuses which he made for not going out proving quite satisfactory to herself, and eliciting no remark on the side of her husband.

Indeed, the Earl of Desborough had sought the solitude of his library more than ever since the arrival of Ramsey at the mansion; and had Eleanor found leisure to observe her husband's manner or notice his personal appearance with any degree of attention, she would have perceived beneath an air of extreme kindness toward herself and of affability toward her lover there was a profound melancholy devouring the nobleman's very vitals, and that his cheeks were growing pale, his form emaciated, and his brow furrowed, with a rapidity that was but too awfully perceptible to all about him save his own adulterous wife and her unprincipled paramour.

Having recorded these few necessary observations, we now resume the thread of our narrative.

It was on the Monday following the Saturday on which Ramsey had returned to his comfortable quarters in Berkeley Square, and at about three o'clock in the afternoon we find him seated in the drawing-room with the lovely and loving Countess of Desborough.

Her ladyship had instructed the domestics that she was not " at home " to any visitors; and she was accordingly giving herself up to all the blandishments of a *tête-à-tête* with him whom she called her " dear Gustavus." Her splendid eyes looked burning fondness and enthusiastic passion upon him, while his reflected the more sensual feeling and fixed their gaze on her countenance with a fervour which she mistook for unalloyed affection as profound and intense as her own.

Never had she seemed more beautiful, nor he more handsome; and, so far as personal appearance went, there was a remarkable fitness in this couple for each other. Their dark hair, olive complexions, large black eyes, brilliant teeth, and classical outline of feature, made them look like brother and sister; while the ardour of their temperament and the strength of the fires that burned within their breasts rendered them suitable partners in the dalliance of love.

" Tell me, my Gustavus, do you indeed entertain for me all the fondness which breathes in your words and gives a glory to your looks? " asked Eleanor, in a tone that was low and tremulous with the soft feelings that prompted the question.

" Can you doubt my love? Do you suspect the truth of

my vows? " said Ramsey, modulating his own voice to the tender sensuousness of the scene; and, taking the hand of the countess, he fastened his lips upon the warm, plump flesh, which thrilled wth the ecstatic fervour that animated her entire being. " Should not I rather question you, my beloved Eleanor," he continued, " respecting the permanence of that attachment which you now feel toward the friendless stranger ? "

" Ah! how can you speak in this mournful, hopeless manner of yourself, Gustavus? " exclaimed the countess, darting upon him a look of mingled devotedness and reproach. " Wherefore use the word friendless? Am not I your friend? Would I not lay down my life to serve you? Oh, my beloved Gustavus, you had forgotten that there was such a being as myself in the world when you made that observation."

" Pardon me, dearest, dearest Eleanor," said the resuscitated criminal, folding that charming and elegant woman in his embrace and imprinting a thousand kisses upon her glowing, burning, blushing cheeks. " I had not forgotten you," he continued, in the murmuring tone which indicates the strength of sensual passion. " No, never, never can I forget you, my beloved; never can I cease to remember that you are the only being whom I ever truly adored and by whom I was ever loved so tenderly in return. All my hopes of happiness are centred in thee, Eleanor. Were I doomed to separate from thee, my well-beloved, I should end my days in the blood of a distracted suicide."

" Oh, speak not in such dreadful terms as these! " whispered the countess, her own voice being subdued and hushed by the power of her passion; and, half-reclining in his arms, she gazed long and ardently upon the handsome countenance of her lover, while the beatings of her heart were plainly audible to the ears of both. " Wherefore should you entertain an idea of even the possibility of our separation? Are you not happy beneath this roof? Do you pant for change, Gustavus? "

" No, no; ten thousand times no, my angel," he responded, accompanying his words with fervid caresses. " How can I possibly pant for change? Oh, no! no! But ask yourself, dearest Eleanor, whether this state of bliss can endure for ever? Does it not appear like a

dream which must inevitably have a waking? Your husband — "

" Oh, let us not talk of him," exclaimed the countess, with a movement of impatience. " Ever since I possessed your love, Gustavus, I have experienced feelings amounting almost to a loathing and a bitter aversion in respect to him."

" I can well understand those emotions, sweet Eleanor," answered the wily criminal; " but you must pardon me if I persist in speaking of the earl for a few moments. Oh, cannot you guess what I mean? Can you not divine that I allude to the possibility of our love being discovered? Each day, each hour we become less guarded. Already has that possibility amounted to a probability, and in another week or ten days it will be an inevitable certainty. Will not the time come then, my ever dear Eleanor, when we must look all this in the face and determine how to meet the emergency? And will it not be better to find ourselves prepared how to act, instead of being left to the irresolution which invariably accompanies the excitement and the confusion of a sudden discovery? Nay, more, would it not be even preferable to anticipate the catastrophe? "

" To what do you allude? What do you mean? " demanded the countess, now for the first time awakening somewhat from her delicious dreams of bliss, and starting back almost in affright from the precipice on which she found herself standing. " You have some plan in your mind, some project, Gustavus — "

" Hear me calmly, my love," interrupted Ramsey, again lavishing upon the charming patrician lady the most tender and ardent caresses, so that the cheek which rested against his own glowed with animation, and the eyes which looked up into his were filled with a lustrous languor, melting yet full of fire. " I beseech and implore you to contemplate, dear Eleanor, the results of a discovery," he continued. " My ignominious expulsion from the house would be the first step taken by your enraged husband, and who knows but that he might sacrifice you to his fury? Then, oh, then, what would become of me? I should destroy myself, and our love would terminate as fatally as our deaths would be premature."

" Alas! alas! there is indeed much truth in this prophetic picture which you have drawn, Gustavus," exclaimed

Eleanor, snatching herself from his embrace and gazing upon him in mingled terror and entreaty. "Tell me, oh, tell me, I conjure you, what course you would have us adopt, what plan you would recommend."

"Eleanor," said Ramsey, in a tone that was solemn and even awe-inspiring, "you have given me every proof of an ardent love, and you have declared that you would die to serve me. But you shall live to bless me: we will live for each other. Oh, can you not comprehend what I would suggest? Do you not understand the nature of the sacrifice which you must make for this love of ours?"

"Speak, speak, Gustavus!" exclaimed the countess, vehemently. "What would you have me do?"

"Fly with me!" was the resolute and yet solemn answer.

"Oh, my God, must it come to that?" cried the lady, bursting into tears and wringing her hands. "Must this love of ours bring disgrace upon me — "

"If you hesitate, Eleanor," interrupted Ramsey, "it is that you love me less than you love the brilliant position which you occupy in the world of fashion. In this case I will leave you, the sooner the better, ere my heart breaks — "

"Leave me! Oh, cruel Gustavus, why give utterance to such menaces?" exclaimed Eleanor, painfully excited. "No, you shall not leave me, we will not separate. I am happy with you, I shall be wretched without you. What to me is the gay and splendid sphere of rank and fashion? Have I not abandoned it for these two weeks past in order to be constantly in your society? Oh, you know not yet how profound is woman's love, you have not learned to appreciate the immensity of her affection. But I will teach you the lesson, Gustavus, and you shall receive from me a far greater proof of my tenderness than any I have yet been able to afford you. For I will surrender my good name in order that I may keep your love, I will fling fame and reputation to the winds, sooner than be separated from thee. Yes, all that woman values most dearly will I resign for your sake, — home, friends, relations, and the world's adulation, and, what is more still, the world's respect. Now will you believe that I love you?"

And as she gave utterance to these last words the patrician lady started from her seat, and drawing herself up to the full of her queenlike stature and her noble height,

she appeared radiant with triumph and overpoweringly beautiful in the Olympian effulgence which the glowing animation of her cheeks and the lustre of her eyes shed around her.

Oh, the broken ties of sacred matrimony, a ruined reputation, a cast-away future, — all, all were now dared and defied by this nobly born woman who was courageous enough to immolate everything dear upon the altar of her still dearer love.

" Eleanor, I thank you; my God! I thank you, from the depths of my soul," exclaimed Ramsey, sinking at her feet and covering her hand with kisses.

" Rise, my well-beloved," she said, little dreaming how much of theatrical effect there was in his proceeding, but judging him by her own fervid sincerity and profound enthusiasm. " What I have pledged myself to do I will perform without a murmur, and the sooner the better, now that my resolution is taken. Pardon me, then," she continued, in a more subdued tone and with a sudden embarrassment of manner, as she pressed her lover's hand affectionately, " pardon me if I now turn the conversation for a moment upon things of worldly importance only. But it is necessary that I should inform you, my beloved Gustavus, that I am not independent of my husband in a pecuniary sense. A few hundreds of pounds, my jewels, these are all the wealth that I can take away with me; and I know that for the present your circumstances are not as prosperous as I could wish them to be."

" But I am young, and I am not wanting in certain intellectual qualifications," answered Ramsey. " I possess a perfect knowledge of the French language, and in the United States of America I may hope, as a tutor or as a translator, to earn a livelihood. And then, in addition to all this, I think I may safely say that by means of certain deeds in my possession I may obtain a considerable sum of money."

" Oh, it grieves me to think that we are compelled to speak of the dross of this world in the same breath with love, which is the gold of the heart's feelings," exclaimed Eleanor. " Enough, then, upon that subject. You know my position, Gustavus; you are aware that it is little more than my profound affection which I can bestow upon thee. Oh, if my fortune were as immense as my love for thee, the wealth

of the Indies would be pauperism in comparison therewith."

"'Tis thy love only which I seek, Eleanor," responded the treacherous criminal, as he strained that confiding and noble-hearted woman to his tainted breast.

They now resumed their seats upon the sofa, composed their countenances and their feelings as well as they were able, — and oh, how different were those feelings that animated them! — and they then began to settle their plans for an early flight from the British capital and from the English shores.

But in the midst of this conversation the Earl of Desborough entered the room; and, actually torturing his inward being with the efforts that he made to assume a calm and even smiling exterior, the deeply to be pitied nobleman said, "That young artist, Eleanor, in whom, as you are aware, I have taken some interest, has brought a portrait which he wishes to exhibit to us. He assures me it is one of rather a startling character, though merely a portrait; but more, he will not tell me until he removes the cloth which covers it. Will you not gratify his very pardonable vanity by consenting to inspect this work of art? And perhaps Mr. Wakefield will likewise honour him?" added the earl, turning toward Ramsey.

"I should have much pleasure, my lord," replied this individual, who invariably found some handy excuse for avoiding a meeting with any strangers who visited the mansion, "but I have a letter to write, of some importance, too, and I perceive," he exclaimed, glancing toward the timepiece on the mantel, "that I shall scarcely be enabled to save the post."

Thus speaking, he bowed and quitted the room.

"You will accompany me, Eleanor, to the parlour, where Mr. Woodfall is waiting my return and your presence?" said the earl, taking his wife's hand.

"Oh, certainly, if it will give you pleasure, Francis," she replied, a sudden emotion of pity, and even of remorse, springing up in her bosom at the idea that in a few hours she was to desert and abandon for ever the husband whose conduct had been characterized by unvarying kindness, generosity, and indulgence toward her.

The earl grasped her hand somewhat tightly, as if with

the impulse of one who feels that the hand so held in his own is trembling, and would therefore give it a reassuring pressure; then, leading her away from the room, the nobleman conducted his beauteous wife to the apartment where George Woodfall was seated.

The artist rose and bowed respectfully to the Countess of Desborough.

"Your ladyship will deem me very presumptuous," he said, "in venturing to solicit you to inspect that portrait," and he pointed toward the picture as it stood against a chair, wrapped up in the cloth in which he had brought it; "but as I believe that I have been more successful in this achievement than in any former effort of my pencil, I was vain enough to hope that your ladyship, and you also, my lord, would not be angry with me for submitting it to your opinion. It is a portrait, nothing more than a portrait, but the portrait of a great criminal whose name recently produced no inconsiderable sensation throughout the country."

"And who may the hero of your picture be, Mr. Woodfall?" inquired the nobleman.

"Your lordship remembers the romantic trial in which the Aylesbury bankers figured as the culprits and Sir Richard Stamford as the prosecutor?" said the artist, interrogatively.

"Oh, perfectly well," was the earl's prompt reply.

"And I, who cannot bear to read the accounts of criminal proceedings," observed Eleanor, "was deeply, or rather, fearfully interested in that extraordinary trial. A lady of my acquaintance was present in the chapel on the morning when the condemned sermon was preached; and she assured me that one of the prisoners — Mr. Ramsey, I think — was a young man whose external appearance aroused feelings of the profoundest sympathy."

"I also was present on the sad occasion to which your ladyship alludes," said George Woodfall; "and it is Mr. Ramsey's portrait which I have painted, from the recollection of his features. So vividly did they become impressed upon my memory that I can at least take credit to myself for the fidelity of the delineation, whatever may be thought of the general workmanship."

Thus speaking, the young artist loosened the knots where the corners of the cloth were tied, and in a few moments withdrew the covering altogether.

The portrait was now revealed.

But, oh, horror! oh, the agonies, the appalling agonies of that moment, alike for the unhappy earl and the maddened Countess of Desborough!

An ejaculation of despair burst from the former; but a wild cry, whose thrilling intonations betrayed all the excruciating anguish which tore her breast, broke from the lips of Eleanor, and, reeling half-around, she fell senseless on the carpet.

" Cover up your picture — bear it away — this moment," said the earl, in a thick, hoarse tone, and with a look of indescribable horror, as he grasped Woodfall's arm convulsively. " We have recognized in that portrait some one whom we knew — under another name — and in earlier years — But no matter," he exclaimed, suddenly checking himself, lest in the excuses which he was attempting he might let drop something calculated to engender strange suspicions in the mind of the artist. " Pray leave us, Mr. Woodfall — pardon this scene — do not mention it elsewhere — it is very painful — and come and see me again in a day or two."

While the nobleman was thus speaking, in hurried and disjointed sentences and with a dreadful excitement of manner, Woodfall had replaced the covering over his picture; and he quitted the apartment just as the domestics, whose ears the thrilling scream of the countess had reached, rushed thither to see what had occurred.

CHAPTER V

THE OUTRAGED NOBLEMAN AND THE RESUSCITATED CRIMINAL

Philip Ramsey, unconscious of the terrible scene which had just occurred and of the appalling discovery that had been made respecting his identity, was pacing his own chamber, not with the agitation of alarm or of annoyance, but with the excitement of triumph and the restlessness that invariably attends even upon the flush of a proud success.

He had so admirably played the hypocrite that the treason he contemplated was now approaching its consummation. The noble woman, so basely deceived, so treacherously beguiled, had promised to fly with him; the arrangements were settled, the plan was determined upon, and in a few hours would the appointed moment arrive at which she was to abandon her husband and her home for ever.

And why had the villain Ramsey thus plotted to annihilate all the little happiness that remained to the earl? Why had he thus drawn the infernal meshes of his duplicity and deceit so completely around the confiding and generous-hearted Eleanor that nought but the last and most irreparable of woman's sacrifices would now content him?

His conduct was the result of cold-blooded calculations; and these calculations may be explained in a few words.

He knew that it was impossible for him to remain for ever beneath the roof of the Earl of Desborough. An accident, the merest chance, the slightest casualty, would betray him. Moreover, even if the tremendous secret connected with his real name, his true history, and his resuscitation from an ignominious fate, even if this secret should remain undiscovered, was it not contrary to all rational hope that his

amour with the countess could continue much longer unsuspected or unperceived?

Thus, in either case and under any circumstances, Ramsey was living in the constant peril of expulsion from the home which he had found so miraculously and from the hospitality which he had abused so atrociously. The earl's bounty had supplied him with some ready money; but this amount was totally insufficient to enable him to escape from the country and fly to some foreign clime. And yet he must lose no time in thus ensuring his safety.

What, then, was to be done? He had calculated that the countess possessed costly jewels and at least some available pecuniary resources; and he resolved, therefore, to make her the companion of his flight. Besides, he had just so much regard for her as any profligate voluptuary experiences for a beautiful mistress; and he, moreover, thought it probable that a lady of her rank and connections would never be left by her relatives without some amount of income, happen what might.

These were the calculations which the cold-blooded villain had made; and the reader is now in possession of the key to his conduct with regard to Eleanor. We have shown how well he succeeded in overruling the last scruples which remained in the bosom of the too confiding lady, and how triumphant was his persuasion that she who had already surrendered to him her honour in secret would make a public sacrifice of home, reputation, friends, and relatives, for his sake.

Glorying in that success, rejoicing in that triumph, Philip Ramsey was pacing his apartment, when the door opened slowly and the Earl of Desborough staggered into his presence.

The ghastly pallor of the nobleman's countenance, the strange workings of his features, the wild expression of his eyes, the visible convulsion of his limbs, and the tottering unevenness in his pace, — all these appearances instantly struck Ramsey with dismay and carried to his guilty soul the terrible conviction that some appalling discovery had been made.

The earl closed the door carefully, locked it, and placed the key in his pocket.

A cold shudder passed over Ramsey's frame, for the idea

flashed to his mind that the outraged husband had discovered his wife's frailty and was come to wreak a deadly vengeance on him, the seducer.

But respecting this apprehension the wretch was almost immediately reassured; for the earl, pointing to a chair, while he himself sank exhausted upon another, said, " Be seated. Whatever now takes place between us must be without excitement, without noise, without passion."

" What does your lordship mean? " demanded Ramsey, with the eagerness of a torturing impatience to learn the extent of the evil which now appeared to menace him.

" I mean, sir," responded the nobleman, continuing to speak in a voice so charged with thickness and hoarseness that it sounded like the worn-out tones of old age, " I mean that the moment when any unguarded proceeding on our part shall make your secret public, that instant will disgrace and dishonour, scorn and ridicule, redound also upon me."

" Ah! my secret — then you know me? " murmured Ramsey, the frightful spasm which shot through his heart making him feel as if the hand of death were there; and he sank helplessly into the chair which he had been invited to take.

" Holy God! is it possible that such a tremendous misfortune should have fallen upon my head, upon that of my wife also? " exclaimed the earl, with a groan that convulsed his entire frame as anguish tore it from the depths of his soul. " But thou, unhappy man, in what haze of horror is thine existence enveloped? In what appalling mystery is thy fate involved? Thou, whom the world believes to be cold and stark in the narrow tomb — "

" In mercy, spare me! " cried Ramsey, suffering all the crucifixion of ineffable torture as these words struck like a barbed arrow into his heart; and, with eyes glaring wildly and brows hideously corrugated, his whole countenance was distorted as if his neck once more felt the pressure of the accursed noose.

" Well, well, I will seek no explanation on that head," said the nobleman, exercising a partial command over his feelings by dint of a tremendous and almost superhuman effort. " Little does it matter to me by what means you escaped the vengeance of the law. All my thoughts, all my ideas, all my feelings should be absorbed in the immense

amount of wanton and heartless injury which you have inflicted upon me."

" My lord, you will deal mercifully with me? " exclaimed Ramsey. " Am I not a worm already crushed so thoroughly beneath the iron heel of an avenging society that you can afford to spare, if not to pity me? "

" Spare you I will, pity you I cannot," rejoined the Earl of Desborough. " And in sparing you I act not through any considerations of mercy, but in order to avert a public scandal and the world's scorn from my house. The imposture you have practised upon me is venial, oh, yes, and your condition in that respect might indeed have commanded my pity; for, on that fatal night when you became an inmate of my dwelling, had you thrown yourself on your knees before me, revealed to me the astounding secret that you were Philip Ramsey the convict, and demanded my forbearance and my succour, I should not have refused your prayer. But you have planted a poisoned dagger in the bosom of my wife; you have made her not only an adultress, but the paramour of a man whose neck has been circled by the halter of the gibbet. Oh, there is the accursed infamy of your conduct, there is the degradation, there is the damnable wrong which you have perpetrated."

And the nobleman, covering his face with his hands, broke forth into the bitterest lamentations.

But Ramsey saw that he was safe, that no positive retribution was intended, and that the earl was prepared to strain every nerve and put every possible violence upon his own feelings rather than suffer it to be known to the world that the resuscitated criminal had been his own friend and his wife's lover. Yes, all this the villain saw and comprehended; and so appalling had been his fears at first, that the joy occasioned by this assurance of impunity and sense of safety nearly overwhelmed him.

And now that he was thus relieved from the most rending apprehensions, he experienced an ardent curiosity to learn how everything had been so suddenly discovered. Could the countess have repented, and betrayed the secret of her amour and intended flight? No, that was a conjecture inconsistent with her character, her love, and her strength of mind. Besides, the idea would not account for the detection of his imposture as Gustavus Wakefield and his identity

as Philip Ramsey. How, then, was the discovery made? The mystery was impenetrable: it defied all the efforts of imagination. Not for an instant did it strike him that the visit of the artist and the exhibition of the picture could have any connection with the sudden catastrophe.

"Mr. Ramsey, or rather, Mr. Wakefield," resumed the earl, again exercising a mastery over his feelings, "for it makes my blood run cold in my veins to call you by the former name, matters have reached that appalling crisis when reproaches are a folly and an absurdity. No possible invective which my lips might frame could convey an idea of the tremendous sense of diabolical outrage which my soul experiences. Words are useless in dealing with such a case. The wrong is inflicted; its nature is horrible to contemplate. But, oh, with what excruciating bitterness of feeling must I admit that I myself was to a great extent the accessory to my own dishonour and to my wife's immeasurable shame. For I knew that you had become her paramour — My God! I knew it — and now my punishment is a hell of the heart's emotions."

And, springing from his seat, the earl began to pace the room with all the frantic agitation of one whose brain was turning.

But suddenly pausing in his demented walk, he confronted Ramsey, saying in a low, hoarse tone, "The sooner we separate, the better. In another hour it will be dusk, and my travelling-carriage will be at the door. If you consent to repair straight to Liverpool and thence embark for the United States, my purse is at your command."

"Greedily, gratefully do I embrace the opportunity," exclaimed the resuscitated.

"Talk not to me of gratitude, profane not good words by breathing them with your polluted lips," said the earl, his voice now suddenly changing to a passionate vehemence as he surveyed Ramsey with looks of indescribable disgust and abhorrence. "Here are five hundred pounds for your use," he exclaimed, tossing down a purse heavy with gold and rustling with bank-notes; "and, by the living God, if you venture to remain in England, if you do not proceed in my carriage direct to Liverpool and thence depart without delay for America, I will show you no more mercy, but proclaim the fact of your existence to the world, and set the blood-

hounds of justice to hunt you to that destruction which you have escaped once."

Having thus given vent to the menaces which his outraged feelings suggested, the Earl of Desborough quitted the room, banging the door violently behind him.

He repaired to his wife's chamber, which was darkened by the heavy curtains being drawn over the windows. Around the bed several persons were speaking in those solemn whispers in which words are exchanged by the couch of an invalid. Two physicians, a nurse, and three of the noble lady's female attendants were gathered there, watching the patient, who was sleeping, but with an uneasy and convulsing slumber.

"What was the cause of this sudden fit?" inquired one of the physicians, addressing himself to the principal lady's-maid.

"I do not know, sir," was the reply. "The earl and her ladyship were inspecting a picture in a room down-stairs, when suddenly a fearful shriek echoed through the house. We ran to the parlour from which it proceeded, and we found the earl dreadfully agitated and her ladyship insensible."

"Ah! some family matter, doubtless," observed the physician.

"Is there any danger, sir?" inquired the lady's-maid.

"The greatest danger," was the prompt reply. "Your noble mistress has received a shock which may end fatally, or perhaps impair the nervous system for the remainder of her days."

"Oh, my poor mistress!" sobbed the dependent, who was devotedly attached to Lady Desborough.

It was at this moment that the earl entered the room; and, advancing on tiptoe toward the bed, he fixed his eyes with mournful earnestness upon the countenance of his wife. The maid servants retired, and the nobleman, seating himself by the side of the couch, took Eleanor's hand in his own. It was cold, icy cold: he pressed it to his lips, he wept over it! Oh, the unhappy nobleman loved his wife tenderly, tenderly.

For upwards of an hour did he remain watching over her as she slept her troubled sleep. No rancour was in his thoughts with regard to her, no animosity in his looks;

but he was all love and affection and pity and compassion, that generous-hearted earl.

At length, as a sudden remembrance struck him, he looked at his watch; and, gently abandoning Eleanor's hand, which all this time he had retained in his own, he issued noiselessly from the room. Hastening to an apartment, the windows of which were in front of the house, he looked forth into the square.

The travelling-carriage was at the door; the postilion was already in the saddle.

A man, enveloped in a cloak, emerged from the house and entered the chaise, which immediately drove off, the occupant drawing up the blinds as it rolled away from the mansion.

Then some degree of relief was experienced by the Earl of Desborough, as he retraced his way to his wife's chamber; for the resuscitated criminal was no longer an inmate of his dwelling.

CHAPTER VI

ROSE FOSTER AGAIN

FIVE days had elapsed since that fatal night on which Rose Foster fell once more into the power of Mrs. Brace, and during this interval the orphan girl had been retained a close prisoner in a bedchamber the windows of which looked upon the small yard that lay between the two houses. The door was kept constantly locked, and thus all possible precautions were taken against another escape.

Harriet, the lady's-maid, took her up her meals at the proper hours; but, although civil and obliging in her general conduct, the domestic held her peace when questioned by the terrified girl respecting the meaning of this imprisonment and the ultimate objects which Mrs. Brace might have in view concerning her. Vainly did Rose implore, through Harriet, an interview with the milliner, whom she hoped to be able to move with her entreaties and her tears if she could only see her; but Mrs. Brace went not near the afflicted, bewildered, and almost heart-broken girl.

Oh, how heavily, how wearily, and how miserably passed the time! By day the hours dragged their slow length along as if they were interminable; and by night the maiden could not sleep, for not only did the bitterness of her sorrow chase away slumber, but she feared to close her eyes lest some treacherous advantage should be taken of the moments of unconsciousness. Tears moistened her pillow, burning tears of anguish, which afforded not the consolation that they usually impart when serving as a vent for grief, but tears which flowed, as it were, from a heart gushing with a fountain of unextinguishable woe.

What had she done, this poor helpless, harmless girl, to be thus cruelly persecuted? Had Heaven in her case forgotten

its pledge to protect the fatherless, or how had she deserved the infliction of so much misery? Her life had been pure and spotless; neither in word nor deed had she ever offended against God or man; and in those happier days which were gone, apparently never to be recalled, she had dispensed her charities with no niggard hand. The poor mendicant had never been turned unaided away from the door of her parents' dwelling; and there were many, many kind acts which Rose had performed in secret but which were recorded in heaven's high chancery to her account.

Alas! alas! she who had so frequently befriended the orphan was now the victim of a bitter persecution in her own orphan state. Cold and cheerless was the great world to her; unblessed seemed her lot, stern and rugged the path which her destiny traced out. A rose in beauty as well as in name, was she doomed to share the rose's fate and be plucked by the ruthless hand of the spoiler, to be scattered and strewn after having ministered to his evanescent caprice with its richness of perfume and its beauty of hue.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon, and Rose was seated in her prison-chamber, with her head leaning upon her hand and her eyes fixed vacantly upon the floor. There were books on the table, there was a harp in one corner of the room, and there were materials for fancy-work at hand; but to none of her favourite recreations could the orphan turn her mind or direct her attention. Too deeply absorbed was she in her own sorrows to be able to follow in imagination the afflictions of the heroine of a romance, too harsh were the discordant notes that vibrated in her heart to permit her feelings to hope that music would soothe them, and the hands that were now so often wrung in despair could not be tutored to ply the needle.

Miserable, very miserable was the orphan; and more than a hundred times in every hour did she wish that she was with her parents in that cold grave over which the roughest human foot may pass without injuring those who sleep beneath.

Suddenly the noise of the key turning in the lock fell upon the maiden's ear; and, starting from her reverie like a timid roe, she waited in breathless suspense and with affrighted looks for the presence of the visitor, this being an hour at which Harriet never was wont to make her appearance there.

The door opened, and Mrs. Brace advanced into the room

with a smiling countenance and all her usual affability of manner.

" My dear child," she said, taking the orphan's hand and looking kindly upon her, so kindly that she must have been a very fiend incarnate if the honey of her smiles were belied by the venom in her heart, " my dear child, I am come to see you at last. You have sent for me very often, but I have been so much engaged — "

" Oh, madam," exclaimed Rose, in a voice of the most touching pathos, withdrawing her hand at the same time, " if you had any hope to give me or any humane feeling to testify toward me, surely you could have spared one single moment to become the bearer of the good tidings. But we will not exchange unnecessary words. Tell me at once, tell me, I conjure you, am I to consider myself a prisoner any longer? "

" ' A prisoner ' is not the proper term, my love," said the milliner, evasively. " You do not know who are your real friends, and therefore I was compelled to use a little restraint — "

" Compelled, madam! " exclaimed Rose. " Am I your slave, or your daughter, or your apprentice? No, I am none of these. By what shadow of right, then, do you exercise any control or coercion over me? "

" This is not language, my love, which it becomes you to utter or me to hear," said Mrs. Brace. " Do not excite yourself, I mean you no harm — "

" Madam," interrupted the orphan, with solemn earnestness of tone and manner, " you do not know who I really am, but I will tell you."

" Yes, my child, I am aware that Camilla Morton was but a feigned name," answered Mrs. Brace, " and that you are properly called Rose Foster. A sweet name is Rose, a name which I love dearly; and if you are a good girl and will only listen to reason, I will point out to you a path leading to such happiness that you will become the envy of all the other young ladies in my establishment."

" You know, then, who I am," said Rose, in a musing tone; " and yet you have no compassion upon the poor friendless orphan whose parents met with so dreadful a death. Oh, I am amazed, I am shocked; and if the world be full of such wickedness, suicide cannot possibly be a crime, inasmuch

as it is the only means which Heaven has placed in the power of the innocent and pure-minded to enable them to escape from ruin at the hands of the cruel, the profligate, and the unprincipled. But since you know who I am, Mrs. Brace," exclaimed the orphan, with passionate vehemence, " perhaps you are also aware that your friend, Mr. Harley, is none other than the Prince of Wales, the man whom circumstances point out as the moral murderer, although not the physical assassin, of my lamented parents."

" Hush, my dear child, in the name of God! Do not talk in this wild and dreadful manner," said the milliner. " His Royal Highness wishes to see you, to throw himself at your feet, implore your pardon for the past, and learn in what way he can serve you for the future. Oh, you will find him contrite and full of sincere regrets; and it will now be his joy and happiness, as well as his duty, to atone for all the sufferings which you have endured through any misconduct or indiscretion on his part."

" Is this possible? " exclaimed Rose, who, despite of the bitter experience which she had recently had of human perfidy, was still too artless, ingenuous, and confiding to suppose that the world's iniquity, hypocrisy, and deception could extend much further.

" It is so possible, my dear child," answered Mrs. Brace, " that his Royal Highness will be here in an hour to confirm all I have just told you. Compose yourself, therefore, to receive him, and you will yet find that much happiness is in store for you."

Having thus spoken, the milliner pressed the young maiden's hand, and hurried from the room; but as the key once more turned in the lock, a damp fell suddenly on the orphan's spirits and a secret voice appeared to whisper to her that she was again betrayed.

Yes, a flood of misgivings poured in unto her soul: for why should she still be retained captive, and why was the prince about to visit her in that bedchamber?

But now a desperate energy nerved the friendless girl; and, remembering with a species of heroic exultation the tremendous exploit that had saved her on the former occasion, she looked around for the means of escape. Alas! none met her view, no plan suggested itself. Useless were it to dare a second descent from the window. Such a proceeding

would only land her in the yard, where her recapture must be inevitable.

But, ah! what hope is this which strikes her? What scheme suddenly springs into existence in her mind?

Wild and romantic idea, and yet is it not feasible?

Yes; and she will attempt it without another instant's delay.

Seating herself at the table, she steadied her hand as well as she could to pen the following lines:

"Whoever finds this, let him at once hasten to succour a persecuted girl who is held prisoner in the dwelling of Mrs. Brace, the dressmaker of Pall Mall. To a constable admission will not dare be refused; and let no excuse or denial be received. The blessing of Heaven will wait upon you who may rescue from dishonour the orphan

"Rose Foster."

Having written this hasty billet, she folded it up and concealed it for the present in her bosom.

Her next proceedings were promptly undertaken and skilfully executed. With a piece of whalebone taken from a pair of stays, and by means of some twisted silk, she made a bow; then, breaking off a thin rail from the back of a chair, she trimmed it with a knife until she reduced it to the degree of lightness fitting it to serve as an arrow. To the end of the stick she fastened her note, and opening the window gently, she shot the arrow completely over the roof of the adjacent house, so that she felt certain it must fall into St. James's Square.

Then closing the window, she cut off the silk from the whalebone and burned the thin shavings of the wood, so that not a trace of her proceeding remained visible inside the chamber.

Hope once more returned to the young maiden's bosom, for she looked upon the thought which had led to the step just adopted, as the inspiration of that Heaven which had not deserted her.

And, oh, in some minds, especially in those of youth, how elastic, how indestructible is hope! Sometimes, to be sure, it is but the last stand which the anguished soul makes against despair; and not very far removed from this case was the position of Rose Foster now.

For had she not received sufficient proof of the unprincipled character of the heir apparent and the extremes to which he was capable of venturing in order to gratify his passions or administer to his selfishness? Had not his heartlessness murdered her parents, and was she not compelled to risk her own life in an appalling manner to escape from his libidinous persecution?

All these reflections swept through the mind of the agitated girl, and nearly overwhelmed the hopes that had sprung up in her bosom; and as the moment approached at which his Royal Highness was to be there, a sense of colossal danger grew upon her with almost overwhelming effect.

At length she heard a stately step drawing near her chamber; the key turned in the lock, the door opened, and the Prince of Wales entered the room.

Closing the door behind him, he advanced with affable mien and extended hand toward the maiden, who stood motionless as a statue and pale as the sculptured marble too, but with her eyes fixed eagerly on his countenance, as if to read her doom in his features.

Then, whether it were that she beheld some sinister light in his eyes, or whether some secret presentiment confirmed all her fears and utterly annihilated all her hopes, we know not; but certain it is that, suddenly starting into full and agonized life from that statue-like stillness, Rose Foster threw herself on her knees before the prince, and, extending her clasped hands toward him, shrieked forth, "Mercy! mercy!"

"Silly maiden, of what are you afraid?" exclaimed his Royal Highness, hastening to raise her, or rather, endeavouring to do so; but she resisted his attempt, withdrawing violently the hands which he had seized in his own. "Miss Foster, for I know who you are," continued George, "I implore you to tranquillize yourself. Do not entertain so much mistrust concerning me. Do not look upon me with such cruel suspicion. Rise, I beseech you."

"Does your Royal Highness swear that you come hither with friendly intentions only?" demanded the terrified girl, still remaining upon her knees, but averting herself almost shudderingly from the prince.

"I swear!" he exclaimed. "And now rise, Miss Foster, rise and give me your attention and your patience."

"If your Royal Highness be truly sincere," said Rose, raising herself up, "you will at once lead the way to another apartment."

And, as she uttered these words, she moved toward the door.

"Stay, Miss Foster, and hear me," cried the prince, interposing himself in such a manner that he effectually barred her passage from the room. "I must and will tell you all that I have to say."

"Not here, not here," ejaculated the maiden, her alarm rapidly heightening; and, as she spoke, she endeavoured to glide past the prince and gain the door.

But he seized her around the waist, and then a piercing shriek burst from her lips. A panic terror for an instant paralyzed the royal voluptuary, and the orphan escaped from his arms before his lips had polluted her virgin cheeks with their hot and lustful kisses. Again she sprang toward the door; but the prince, suddenly placing his back against it, exclaimed, "Miss Foster, I have said that you must and shall hear me, and, by Heaven! I will keep my word."

The unhappy girl, shrinking back in unspeakable terror, clasped her hands and fixed upon the heir apparent a look so full of earnest entreaty and pathetic appealing that had not his heart been made of the hardest granite those imploring eyes would have melted his callosity.

"Oh, will not your Royal Highness have pity upon me?" she exclaimed, once more falling upon her knees and addressing the unprincipled voluptuary in a rending tone. "My God! what have I done that your Royal Highness should become my bitterest enemy, my most relentless persecutor? All I ask is to be permitted to eat the bread of mine own honest industry; but you, yes, you, the heir to the throne of these realms, are resolved upon reducing me to misery, ruin, and despair. And, oh, blame me not if your own conduct now wrings bitter and reproachful words from my lips, but rather blame yourself for acting in a manner which compels me to remind your Royal Highness how cruelly, cruelly I have already suffered through you. Am I not an orphan, at the age of sixteen, deprived of those parents who loved me so well and whom I loved so tenderly in return, and does not their death lie at your door? O God! when I think of all this, my brain reels, my blood boils,

and I feel diabolical thoughts springing up in my mind, as if I craved for vengeance, I who have never even trodden upon a worm, much less inflicted an injury upon a human being."

And bending her head forward, the young maiden covered her face with her hands and burst into an agony of tears.

The prince stood irresolute; he knew not how to act. On the one hand, he was maddened by the desire to possess that lovely girl, who appeared to him even more charming than ever in the midst of the grief which convulsed her; but, on the other hand, the reproaches to which she had just given utterance, raised something like a feeling of remorse in his soul.

Nearly a minute passed, during which his Royal Highness remained leaning against the door, his eyes gloating upon the beauteous kneeling figure at his feet, and his compunctious feelings waging a severe struggle with his burning desires.

The violence of the orphan's grief having thus leisure to subside somewhat and the poignancy of her anguish to receive a slight mitigation, she withdrew her hands from her countenance, raised her eyes timidly, and was instantly struck by the expression of hesitation and uncertainty which was legibly depicted upon the features of her persecutor. A gleam of hope flashed to her soul; and starting to her feet once more, she hastily wiped away the tears, those drops of diamond dew that gave sweetness and softness to the light of the eyes on whose long lashes they hung.

"Your Royal Highness is touched by my appeal," she exclaimed, in a voice which was still broken by deep sobs, though during the intervals between those evidences of profoundly concentrated emotions it was tremulously clear and musically pathetic, "and you will not add to my afflictions by any outrage or wrong. Consider my position, great prince, and have mercy upon me. An orphan and friendless, I have no protector, no vindicator. Bitter, bitter, is my lot in this world, Heaven knows, and yet gall may be added to that bitterness, and my sorrows may be enhanced to despair. For, as there is a God above us, I vow that if disgrace and shame and ruin should overtake me, I will not survive that crowning misery, that consummating woe. No, never, never; but in a voluntary death, dark and terrible though the crime may be, will I end my wretched existence. Spare me, then,

spare me, great prince, and let me depart hence in safety. Do this, and I will forgive you for the past, I will cease to look upon you as the cause of my parents' de th. Oh, spare me, spare me! On my knees again do I implore your Royal Highness to spare me."

" Will you hear me for a single moment? " exclaimed the prince, darting forward and sustaining her as she was about to sink into a suppliant posture once more. Then, ere the shriek of terror which rose to her lips had time to burst forth, he quitted the slight hold that he had laid upon her and resumed his leaning attitude against the door. " Now you perceive," he said, hastily, " that I am not unreasonable, that I can tutor myself to the exercise of forbearance, and that I deserve alike your attention and your patience."

" Speak, speak! " cried the trembling girl, casting down her eyes beneath the devouring looks of passion which he bent upon her. " What has your Royal Highness to say to me? Wherefore can you not be generous and grant my prayer at once? "

" Because I wish to make you a proposal, Rose," was the immediate response; " and I fervently hope, nay, I conjure you, that it may receive a calm and serious consideration."

" A proposal! " murmured the young orphan, with a cold shudder passing over her entire frame. " What proposal can the Prince of Wales have to make to an obscure, humble, and unhappy girl? Oh, none, none that is honourable and to which I ought to listen," she added, with wildness in her voice, her looks, and her manner.

" In the name of God, tranquillize yourself, if only for a few minutes," exclaimed the prince. " For it is precisely because you are obscure, humble, and unhappy that you should not turn a deaf ear to the words which I am about to utter. And start not when I declare that inasmuch as you are beautiful and good and virtuous, so do I love and esteem and admire you. But marriage is impossible — you know that I cannot address you with truthfulness and sincerity on that point; and the time for practising any duplicity or delusion toward you is past. What, then, do I propose? That you should consent to be unto me as a wife, though without the name; and to you will I conduct myself as a tender and affectionate lover. Wealth, luxury, and profusion shall surround you; a splendid mansion shall be

your residence, troops of menials shall attend upon you, ministering to your slightest wants, and when you roll through the park in your gorgeous equipage, who of all the beauties gathered there will be more envied, more admired, or more courted than the acknowledged mistress of the heir apparent to the British throne?"

The prince had been suffered to proceed uninterruptedly in his speech, because mingled shame and indignation had sealed the young virgin's lips, — shame at the thought that her character should be so lightly estimated as even to warrant the audacious proposal thus made to her, and indignation at the proposal itself. But as the prince continued in the development of his plan, a faintness crept upon the maiden's heart, and anger gave way to terror as the conviction was borne in unto her mind that the profligate persecutor was capable of any atrocity in order to obtain his ends. The colour came and went upon her cheeks a dozen times in a minute as these successive feelings and emotions agitated her bosom; but when his Royal Highness beheld her pale countenance suddenly suffusing with a warm blush, he in his gross nature mistook the cause, and fancied that his proposal was received with an augmenting pleasure that had to struggle against her virgin bashfulness.

Great was his surprise, therefore, ineffable was his amazement, when Rose Foster, suddenly inspired with the energy which is often furnished by despair, started from her trembling, timid attitude, drew herself up to the full of her graceful height, and extending her right arm toward him, exclaimed, in a tone of command, "Silence, and pollute the air no longer with those words which are as baleful as a pestilence."

Oh, grand in thy virgin dignity, overpowering in thy maiden modesty wast thou at that moment, thou lovely and pure-minded orphan girl! The royal voluptuary, unable to believe the evidence of his own ears and eyes, was staggered by thy words and amazed by thy demeanour. And beautiful, oh, incalculably beautiful was the effect of thy statuesque attitude and the noble expression of thy soft and touching features, at that moment animated with a sense of outrage and insult. Oh, deep, deep is the sympathy that we entertain for thee, thou virtuous and charming girl; and sooner than the hand of the spoiler shall grasp thee

rudely in the embrace of unhallowed lust, sooner than thy purity and thine innocence shall be sacrificed to the passions of thy persecutor, ay, and sooner than thou, with thine own consent, shall become the mistress of the royal profligate, we would see thee dead, laid in the cold grave, and we would ourselves exclaim, " Back, back to the realms of heaven, thou ray from Jehovah's brow! "

Yes, the prince was indeed amazed and staggered by the words and the demeanour of the young orphan; and before he could recover from the state of feeling into which he was thus thrown, she addressed him with a solemn and touching earnestness which would have evoked a generous response from any other individual.

" No words, Prince of Wales," said Rose Foster, " can describe the indignation with which I reject, nay, scorn and recoil from, the proposal which you have dared to make me. The ladies of the aristocracy may deem it an honour to become notorious as the prince's favourite wantons; but the humble daughter of the people turns in loathing and wrath from the bare idea of such ignominy. Oh, well does the nation know that the higher the grade, the less virtue is to be found in it; and the despised, scorned, tyrant-ridden, and starving millions may take to themselves credit for virtues unknown amongst their titled oppressors. Go, Prince of Wales, go amongst your duchesses, your marchionesses, and your countesses, and pay your court to them: you know full well that they will not refuse your love-suit, but will deem it an honour to surrender up all purity, innocence, and virtue at the shrine of royalty. Yes, go to them, but dare not to breathe the same tale in my ears. The daughters of the people know that shame and infamy, however highly gilded, are shame and infamy still, and that the tarnish of a frail woman's reputation shows through the costliest veil with which the bounty and profusion of a royal lover may seek to conceal it. Now then, Prince of Wales, be generous, be great, be good, and allow me to depart in safety. I will thank you for this act of mercy, if you will concede it; for though I may more properly call it a deed of justice, yet will I speak of it and regard it in the light of a bounteous and humane concession from a mighty prince toward an obscure and friendless orphan girl."

" By Heavens! I know not how to answer you, how to

deal with you, singular and incomprehensible creature that you are," exclaimed the heir apparent, who could not help thinking that if the maiden appeared ravishingly charming and profoundly interesting in the midst of her grief and tears, she was radiantly attractive and overpoweringly beautiful in the flush of her excitement and the goddess-like dignity of her attitude.

" In one word," she said, trembling inwardly through fear of a refusal, " I beseech your Royal Highness to suffer me to leave this room and this house, and everything that I have previously endured at your hands shall be forgotten."

" Oh, no, no," he exclaimed, his passion maddening him; " I cannot part with thee thus easily, thou adorable creature."

And springing forward, he caught the young maiden in his arms.

A piercing scream burst from her lips, and she struggled desperately to tear herself from his embrace. But, excited almost to a delirious pitch by the fury of his desires, he seemed like a madman bent upon accomplishing his aim without the slightest regard for the consequences; and the wretched girl found her strength failing her and her senses ebbing away, as every moment saw her struggles becoming weaker and her cries more subdued, while the triumph of the prince appeared more and more certain.

But suddenly the door was burst violently open, and Tim Meagles, followed by Melmoth, the working man, rushed into the chamber.

CHAPTER VII

THE FRIENDSHIP OF ROYALTY

To dash forward, hurl aside the Prince of Wales, and catch Rose Foster in his arms, — all this was the work of a single instant with Meagles; and when his Royal Highness, uttering a terrible imprecation, was about to spring upon his friend Tim and deal him a savage blow, Melmoth seized upon the heir apparent without hesitation, pinioning him fast, despite of the desperate struggles he made to extricate himself.

But scarcely was all this accomplished, and Rose had begun to murmur a few words of heartfelt thanks to her brave deliverer, when three men, armed with staves, entered the room, followed by Mrs. Brace's two footmen, the milliner herself, and Harriet, the lady's-maid.

The fact was that Meagles and Melmoth the working man, having been out together the whole morning instituting inquiries concerning Rose, were standing in St. James's Square deliberating what course they should pursue now, five days of research having already proved vain and fruitless, when they observed an arrow lying upon the pavement near the enclosure; and curiosity prompting them to pick it up, to their indescribable amazement they found the note which at once cleared up everything in respect to Miss Foster's hitherto unaccountable disappearance. But as Tim Meagles was well aware that Mrs. Brace's establishment was secretly patronized and protected by the Prince of Wales, and, moreover, as the law gave him no power to force his way into it without the countenance of some legal proceedings or the presence of some legal functionaries, he hastened to procure the assistance of three constables. These officers went with him and Melmoth to the house,

which they all unceremoniously entered; and, in spite of the remonstrances, threats, and entreaties of Mrs. Brace, a search was commenced throughout the premises. In a short time the screams issuing from a particular chamber led the party in that direction, but on Mrs. Brace's hurriedly whispering to Meagles that the prince was with Miss Foster and that a scandal must be avoided, he had ordered the constables to remain on the landing of the staircase, while he and Melmoth prosecuted the search by themselves. However, the noise of the struggling between Melmoth and the prince and the terrible imprecation to which the latter gave vent made the officers fear that violence was being used; and in order to adopt the necessary precautions to preserve the peace as well as to take any offender into custody, they hurried to the scene of action, despite the endeavours of the two tall footmen to hold them back and the entreaties of Mrs. Brace that they would not push their interference any farther.

The constables, who of course belonged to the parish, instantly recognized the Prince of Wales; and, their ideas of justice being as immediately absorbed in the notion that as kings can do no wrong, so the heirs of kings must be equally incapable of offending, they at once and without a moment's hesitation rushed to his rescue. Melmoth, the working man, was unceremoniously knocked down and laid senseless on the carpet by the heavy staves of the functionaries; and these legalized ruffians, having thus disposed of one of the persons who dared seek their assistance in order to interfere with the pleasures of his Royal Highness, thought that they could not possibly be doing the prince a greater service than by knocking down the other person in a similar style. Quick as lightning, therefore, were their bludgeons turned from Melmoth upon Meagles; and the brave defenders of poor Rose Foster were both stretched powerless at her feet.

So rapidly had this second act in the drama passed that the heir apparent had not the time, even if he had possessed the inclination, to interfere on behalf of Tim Meagles; and it was with a species of consternation that he beheld the sudden diversion created in his favour by the decided though inconsiderate course adopted by the constables.

A strange scene of confusion now followed. Rose Foster had fainted when she beheld her champions so summarily

and ferociously dealt with; and she was borne away by Mrs. Brace and Harriet to another chamber. Restoratives were administered to Tim Meagles and the working man and while these individuals were being recovered, the Prince of Wales paced the room with rapid and uneven steps, deliberating how he should act in regard to them.

That an irreconcilable breach had now suddenly occurred between himself and Meagles, was evident; and he knew Tim quite well enough to be aware that he was capable of proving as dangerous an enemy as he had been a valuable friend. The present crisis was an alarming and a difficult one, especially as it might lead to an exposure of everything connected with Rose Foster's deceased parents and the causes which had led to the father's suicide and the mother's sudden death. Moreover, the prince saw that in many other respects he was deeply in the power of Meagles; and he perceived at a glance that his ex-friend would sooner or later stand in the light of an extortioner demanding immense recompenses for former services rendered. These rewards, titles, honours, places, and pensions would be wrested by menaces instead of besought as boons, and thus, in every point of view, was it quite clear to the Prince of Wales that if he ever intended to make an attempt to crush Meagles altogether, now was the time.

Such were the reflections that passed, with rapid sweep, through the mind of the Prince of Wales during the couple of minutes that he paced with uneven and agitated steps the chamber where so many varied and stirring incidents had occurred. To a man so thoroughly heartless and capable of such black ingratitude as his Royal Highness, it was not very difficult to arrive at a decision.

But even while he was yet wavering how to act, the senior constable, who bore the euphonious name of Bax, accosted him, with many low bows, and gave every possible intimation, short of the utterance of words, that he craved permission to speak.

" Well, now, what is it? " demanded the prince, observing that the man was fidgeting around about him.

" Please your Royal Highness," said Mr. Bax, with another very low bow, " these fellers must be took into custody for assault and battery on your Royal Highness's person.

One of 'em I don't know nothink of," he continued, pointing toward Meagles; " but t'other," he added, indicating the working man, " is a very notorious character."

" Who is he, then? " asked the prince, impatiently.

" His name's James Melmoth, may it please your Royal Highness," responded Bax; " and he's one of the most seditious scoundrels in all England. He speaks at public meetings, tells the working classes they're oppressed, and denounces all kings and princes in a wery savage style indeed, saving the presence of your Royal Highness."

" Ah! then the fellow must be crushed at once, or he will turn around upon me also," muttered the prince to himself. " Damnation seize upon this dilemma into which I have worked myself! Yes, there is no alternative; the seditious villain must be crushed, or he will expose the entire affair at the very next public meeting he attends. But what do you purpose to do? " he demanded aloud, and looking Mr. Bax full in the face.

" I know my dooty as well as any man breathing, and so does my two partners here," replied the constable. " Why, what is the facts of the case? We happen to be passing by Mrs. Brace's establishment, and we see your Royal Highness standing inside the shop making a few purchases, when in come two ruffins, and without no manner of provocation they insults your Royal Highness, and well knowing who your Royal Highness was, they pitches into your Royal Highness, and your Royal Highness — "

" Good, good! " ejaculated the prince. " I see that you understand how these little matters are managed. But are your companions to be equally well depended upon? "

" Quite, may it please your Royal Highness," answered Bax.

" Then let the two scoundrels be taken into custody and conveyed to the Home Office," said the prince, at the same time slipping his purse into the constable's hand. " And mind, Mr. Bax, as I shall not be there to give evidence, mind, I say," continued the heir apparent, fixing a look full of meaning upon the functionary, " mind that they are both seditious characters, both notorious rogues and disaffected persons, both dangerous to the state — "

" Ah! that they be," observed Bax, with a glance that showed how well he understood the part he was to play in

PORTRAIT OF GEORGE, PRINCE OF WALES
Photogravure after painting by Hoppner

One of 'em I don't know nothink of," he continued, pointing toward Meagher; "but t'other," he added, indicating the working man, "is a very notorious character."

"Who is he, then?" asked the prince inquisitively.

"He's called James Belmoth, may it please your Royal Highness," responded Bax; "and he's one of the most seditious scoundrels in all England. He speaks at public meetings, tells the working classes they is oppressed, and says as all kings and princes is a very tough lot to live in-deed, saving the presence of your Royal Highness."

"And thus the fellow must be crushed at once or he will turn round upon me also," murmured the prince to himself. "Revolutions seize upon this circumstance with which I have clothed myself! Yes, there is no alternative—the seditious villain must be crushed, or he will expose the entire affair at the very next public meeting he addresses. How would do you purpose to do?" he demanded aloud, addressing Mr. Bax full in the face.

"I knows my duty as well as any man in the force, and so does my two partickler pals," was the reply. "Why, what is the use of my being in the police, and passing by Mrs. Fraser's establishment, and not seeing your Royal Highness entering under the pretence of purchases, when in comes two ruffians, and subjects you to insult of provocation they knows your Royal Highness, and well knowing who your Royal Highness was, they publishes your Royal Highness, and your Royal Highness—"

"Good, good!" ejaculated the prince. "I see that you understand how these little matters are managed. But are your companions to be equally well depended upon?"

"Quite, may it please your Royal Highness," answered Bax.

"Then let the two scoundrels be taken into custody and conveyed to the Home Office," said the prince, at the same time slipping his purse into the constable's hand. "And mind, Mr. Bax, as I shall not be there to give evidence, mind, I say," continued the heir apparent, in a tone full of meaning upon the functionary, "mind that you are both active fellows, both notorious for your prowess, both conspicuous to the state."

PORTRAIT OF GEORGE, PRINCE OF WALES

Photogravure after painting by Hoppner

"Ah! that they be," observed Bax, with a glance that showed how well he understood the part he was to play in

the matter. "And now, as they are both rekivering, I should advise your Royal Highness to withdraw."

"Your counsel is excellent," said the prince. "I cannot condescend to bandy words with such men, should they seek to address me and implore my pardon for this unprovoked outrage which they have perpetrated upon me."

Having thus spoken, and in this last sentence conveying to Mr. Bax a hint relative to the language in which his evidence was to be couched at the Home Office, the Prince of Wales quitted the chamber just at the moment when Tim Meagles and James Melmoth were being restored to complete consciousness.

Having hastily reassured Mrs. Brace respecting any fears which she might entertain of exposure, scandal, and disgrace, and having recommended her to keep Rose Foster a close prisoner for the present, his Royal Highness hurried back to Carlton House, which was only a couple of minutes' walk from the milliner's abode.

Immediately on reaching his private apartment, he summoned Germain to his presence, and addressed that faithful servitor in the following manner:

"You will proceed without an instant's delay to the lodgings of Mr. Meagles in Jermyn Street. I know that he is not at home at this moment, neither will he return for some time. But you will say that you are anxious to see him, and will therefore wait for him. When alone in his apartments you will open his desk, closets, cupboards, trunks, everything where letters or papers are likely to be kept; and all such letters and papers which you can find you will conceal about your person and bring to me. Never mind about breaking open locks, hesitate not to force doors or drawers, so long as you accomplish my commands. And if interrupted by anybody, declare boldly that Mr. Meagles is in a scrape, and that he requires his papers to help him out of it. If need be that you should say more than this, then state with equal effrontery that you are my servant, and that it is by my orders you are thus acting on behalf of my valued and esteemed friend, Mr. Meagles. Do you comprehend me?"

"Perfectly, may it please your Royal Highness," answered Germain; and, with a low bow, he retired to execute the commission thus entrusted to him.

The motive of the Prince of Wales in directing this step to be taken may be explained in a few words. It was not that he suspected for a moment that Meagles had purloined from him the papers proving his marriage with Mrs. Fitzherbert, and the half of the Lightfoot certificate; but it was because he himself had on many occasions written notes to Meagles upon private affairs, which he was loth to have published to the world, and he thought it probable that Tim might have preserved those letters, in which case it was only prudent to regain possession of them.

We shall now follow Germain and ascertain the result of his mission.

On arriving at Mrs. Piggleberry's house in Jermyn Street, the French valet was informed (as indeed he had been led to expect) that Mr. Meagles was not at home. He accordingly declared that he wished to see him very particularly, and would walk in and await his return. The polite landlady, who knew that he was in the service of the prince, showed him up-stairs to Meagles's sitting apartment, where she of course left him.

The instant that he was alone, Germain began to inspect the place, and a writing-desk on a side-table immediately attracted his notice. It was locked; but before he broke it open, Germain took the precaution of trying all the keys that were upon a bunch in his own pocket, and one of them happened to fit the desk. A hasty glance over the papers which it contained enabled him to separate the letters and correspondence from the useless documents, such as tradesmen's bills, sporting memoranda, betting records, etc.; and having completed his research in respect to the desk, the valet proceeded to examine the cupboards and drawers in the adjoining bedroom. He, however, discovered no more papers, and pocketing those which were set aside to be taken away, he descended the stairs, observed to Wasp, whom he encountered in the hall, that he could not wait any longer, and returned to Carlton House.

The packet of documents which he had thus stolen from Meagles's lodgings was now delivered into the hands of the Prince of Wales, who was impelled by motives of curiosity to inspect them forthwith.

But how great was his surprise, how profound his amazement, when he discovered amongst them the very correspond-

ence which he had missed from his own desk some weeks previously, and which contained the proofs of his marriage with Mrs. Fitzherbert!

"Then Meagles really was a traitor and a scoundrel," cried the prince aloud, as he assured himself that the papers were indeed the originals and no forged imitations. "He must have stolen them, the villain, stolen them from me, his benefactor and patron. But he will be punished at length, that is, if I know anything at all of English home secretaries and of Home Office proceedings. Ah! ah! Master Meagles, caught at last, eh?" exclaimed the heartless heir apparent, with a triumphant laugh. "Much as the Ministers dislike me as an individual, they have a profound veneration for royalty, and they will save this royalty from being in any way damaged, even though I am its representative who must now be vindicated. Yes, yes; there is no fear but that Meagles and his companion Melmoth will get the worst of it at the Home Office."

And again the treacherous, ungrateful prince chuckled joyously.

Then, resuming his examination of the papers, he discovered not only the half of the Lightfoot certificate which he had lost, but likewise the remaining moiety, and here was another cause for wonderment and satisfaction.

But there was still a packet of papers to inspect; and, to his increasing surprise, the heir apparent found that they were all in the handwriting of Mrs. Fitzherbert. And, ah! to whom were they addressed? To the Marquis de Bellois, a nobleman whom his Royal Highness knew to be at that moment in England, and whose name had been more than once mentioned to him by Tim Meagles.

Impelled by a devouring curiosity, and also animated by startling suspicions, the prince addressed himself to the task of perusing the numerous letters contained in this last mentioned packet. But, oh, why does his cheek blanch, why does his lip quiver, why does he become nervous and trembling, as if a strange excitement be growing upon him? Yes, and more acutely wrung are his feelings, now that the damning truth is carried to his soul, — the truth that Mrs. Fitzherbert was faithless to his bed and had been the paramour of another. And more, oh, more still remains behind; but it is speedily revealed, speedily developed by means of

those letters. For Mrs. Fitzherbert had become a mother during her foreign tour; yes, that woman whom he had married, his own wife, had born a child to the Marquis of Bellois.

Dashing down the papers, the Prince of Wales started from his seat and began to pace the room in an agitated manner.

It was true that his connection with Mrs. Fitzherbert was now completely broken off, true also that she had been ignominiously expelled, as it were, from Carlton House, true that he sought not to exercise any further control over her. But he was wounded to the quick at the idea that he had so long been her dupe, that the late partner of his bed had played the harlot in a foreign clime and with a foreign noble, and that he had for years cherished the belief that, whether with him or absent from him, she had remained faithful to her love and her vows.

Then there sprang up in the heart of the prince a bitter, burning hatred against the Marquis de Bellois, whom he looked upon as a successful rival, nay, whom he even regarded in the same light as a husband views the seducer of his wife. And upon this French refugee the Prince of Wales vowed to be avenged sooner or later, and by some means or another, he cared not how, but he hoped it would be soon.

The secret of Tim Meagles's success in compelling Mrs. Fitzherbert to leave Carlton House so abruptly was now fully explained. It was evident to the prince that he must have menaced that lady with exposure in respect to the amour whereof he possessed such damning proofs. Nor less did the possession of the Lightfoot certificate afford a complete clue to the tactics adopted by Meagles in negotiating with the king respecting the peerage and pension which had since been conferred, according to promise, upon Mr. Clarendon.

"Thank God," exclaimed the Prince of Wales, as he secured all the documents in his desk, "thank God that I thought of sending Germain to rifle my late friend's lodgings. The incident at Mrs. Brace's this afternoon, although at first so menacing, has turned out entirely to my advantage, since it led to my becoming possessed of these most important papers. And another desirable result will be presently

gained," he added, with a smile of haughty triumph, "for the villain Meagles is sure to be crushed beyond all possibility of redemption. Thank Heavens, the habeas corpus act is suspended just at this moment."

CHAPTER VIII

THE PROCEEDINGS AT THE HOME OFFICE

Thus did the Prince of Wales congratulate himself upon the certainty of irretrievable ruin overtaking the man who, whatever fault he might have committed and whatever treachery he might have perpetrated in purloining papers from the heir apparent's desk, had nevertheless served his Royal Highness with such fidelity and zeal on innumerable occasions as to deserve at least some degree of leniency at his hands.

But while the prince was musing in that heartless style, an important investigation had already commenced at the Home Office.

In a lofty, spacious, and handsomely furnished apartment, three gentlemen were seated at a table. A clerk was employed in taking down the depositions at a desk near one of the windows; and midway between the table and the desk Meagles and Melmoth were standing. Two of the constables guarded the door, and Mr. Bax, the senior functionary, was under examination.

Of the three gentlemen at the table the one who occupied the chair at the head was the under-secretary of state for the Home Department, his superior in that office being engaged elsewhere at a Cabinet Council. On the right hand sat the attorney-general, and on the left the chief magistrate of Bow Street.

The names and addresses of Timothy Meagles and James Melmoth had been duly taken down; and Mr. Bax was now giving his evidence, or rather, his version of the affair involving the charge against the prisoners.

" Please, gentlemen," said the constable, " me and my two partners was walking along Pall Mall West quite pro-

miscuously and saying nothin' to nobody, when we see a rayther stout gentleman in the shop of Mrs. Brace, the highly respectable milliner. Well — "

"Merciful Heavens!" exclaimed Meagles, who as well as his co-accused had hitherto been held speechless with amazement at the tremendous falsehood of the constable's preface, "so far from the prince being in the shop — "

"Silence, prisoner!" said the under-secretary, sternly; "you will have an opportunity of cross-examining the witness presently."

"Very good, sir," observed Meagles, bowing respectfully.

"Don't answer me, sir, I tell you!" vociferated the under-secretary, flying into a passion.

"Your conduct is anything but like that of an innocent man, Mr. Meagles," said the chief magistrate of Bow Street, coldly and sternly.

"The impression you have already made on my mind is most unfavourable to you," added the attorney-general, with a look full of hatred and spite at both the prisoners.

"Gentlemen, I can assure you — " began Meagles, more surprised than indignant at the observations just made, for he was wondering in what manner he could have offended so grievously and likewise so prejudicially to his own interests.

"Silence, once for all!" ejaculated the under-secretary.

"Or we shall be compelled to have you removed and go on with the evidence in your absence," observed the chief magistrate of Bow Street.

Meagles bit his lip almost till it bled, for he could scarcely repress a violent outburst of indignation at the cowardly bullying to which he was being subjected; while James Melmoth found it equally difficult to restrain the fury that was boiling within him, and the effort to subdue which rent his very heart-strings with an excruciating anguish.

"Go on, Bax, with your statement," said the chief magistrate of Bow Street.

"Well, gentlemen," resumed the witness, "I was informing your honours how me and my two partners was a-walking promiscuously along Pall Mall when we see a rayther stout gentleman in Mrs. Brace's shop. At fust his back was toward the door; but presently he turned around, and then we twigged — "

"Recognized, my good friend," suggested the attorney-general, administering a verbal corrective in a tone whose blandness contrasted remarkably with that which he had adopted when speaking to Meagles.

"Thank'ee, sir, I meant to say recognized," continued Bax.

"And whom did you recognize?" asked the chief magistrate, also speaking in a mild voice and with agreeable manner.

"His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales," returned the constable. "He was talking to Mrs. Brace, which is a wery respectable lady as always pays her rates and taxes without a murmur and reg'larly illuminates her house on all royal birthdays."

"Ah! a truly loyal subject," observed the under-secretary, with an approving glance at the attorney-general. "Please to continue your evidence, Mr. Bax."

"And let him remember he's on his oath," exclaimed Melmoth, sternly, for the working man was unable to subdue his feelings any longer.

"Silence, fellow!" ejaculated the under-secretary.

"These constant interruptions are intolerable," cried the chief magistrate.

"They show clearly enough that the prisoners are aware of the desperate condition in which they have placed themselves," said the attorney-general. "But such infamous attempts to intimidate the witness —"

"The attempts are made to intimidate us," exclaimed Melmoth, with an energetic gesticulation.

"How dare you threaten to strike the witness?" vociferated the under-secretary, starting from his seat.

"I did no such thing, I only waved my arm in the air," replied Melmoth, undaunted by the menacing mien assumed by the under-secretary. "But let the witness go on and finish his story."

"Proceed, Mr. Bax," said the chief magistrate.

"Well, your honours," resumed the constable, "as his Royal Highness was giving his orders to Mrs. Brace, the two prisoners come along the street arm in arm and looking wery disorderly. Me and my partners instantly twigged — I mean recognized them, and we at once knowed them to be two of the most desperate spouters at public meetings —"

" I never was at a public political meeting in my life," ejaculated Meagles.

" Oh, very well, you've committed yourself now," said the attorney-general, with a sardonic smile of triumph as he caught up the prisoner's remark. " You declare that you were never at a public political meeting, and the natural inference, of course, is that the meetings which you do attend are of a private character. Very good, Mr. Meagles; you stand confessed a member of secret societies. Take that down in the depositions, Mr. Prescott," added the attorney-general, speaking to the clerk.

" By Heaven! I will not submit to this diabolical misinterpretation! " ejaculated Meagles, his countenance becoming crimson with wrath, and every vein on his forehead swelling almost to bursting.

" It is scandalous, perfectly fiendlike," exclaimed Melmoth. " No Russian tyranny or Spanish inquisitorial despotism was ever worse."

" Silence, both of you, or you shall be removed immediately," cried the under-secretary, who had posted himself upon the rug in front of the fire.

Tim Meagles threw a hasty look upon Melmoth, as much as to hint that they had better subdue their feelings as well as they could and let the witness proceed to the end, or else their removal from the room would deprive them of any little chance which they possessed of amending their own cause by shaking his testimony when the moment for cross-examining him should arrive. But that glance escaped not the lynx-eyed attorney-general, who instantaneously rendered it available to his own purposes.

" Did you observe those looks of intelligence which passed between the prisoners? " he demanded, addressing himself to the under-secretary and the chief magistrate; and, as they both nodded their heads affirmatively, the great legal functionary continued to exclaim, " Every step that is taken in this investigation yields fresh proofs of the dangerous characters of these men. Not only do they belong to secret societies, by their own unguarded admissions, but they actually carry their presumption so far as to communicate with each other by means of secret signs in our presence."

" 'Tis false, false as hell! " ejaculated Melmoth, stamping his foot furiously upon the carpet.

" Do not let us be provoked into intemperate language, my good friend," said Meagles, earnestly. " I beseech you to be tranquil for the present."

Melmoth bit his lip and held his peace; but the agitated workings of his countenance plainly indicated how poignantly his soul was tortured by the effort which he was compelled to make to subdue a terrific explosion of those outraged feelings that sought a vent.

" Proceed, Mr. Bax," said the chief magistrate of Bow Street.

" I was observing, gentlemen," resumed the witness, " that while his Royal Highness was in Mrs. Brace's shop, a-talking to a young gal there — I mean to the milliner herself," he hastened to add, " them two prisoners come along the street in a disorderly manner, and looking just as if they was anxious to get up a row and collect a mob. Me and my partners, knowing them to be seditious characters and evil-disposed persons, kept a eye upon them; and, lo and behold! they walks straight into Mrs. Brace's shop, begins pulling the bonnets, the gowns, and the gals about, and takes liberties with the lady herself. The prince very nat'rally remonstrated with them; but scarcely had he begged them to take theirselves off, when one gives him a poult in the eye, and t'other a dab on the cheek, and there's no doubt in the world that his Royal Highness would have been killed stone dead in less than a minute if me and my partners hadn't rushed in and secured the rioters. A more unperwoked outrage I never vitnessed in all my life."

" And did the prisoners know that it was his Royal Highness whom they were thus atrociously, brutally, and barbarously attacking? " inquired the attorney-general.

" To be sure they did," ejaculated Mr. Bax. " For they told him that they should like to serve his d——d old father in the same way."

" Did they utter any treasonable language? " demanded the attorney-general. " I mean, did they say anything which led you to believe that they aimed at the overthrow of the monarchical institutions of this country? "

" Oh, plenty of such sayings as them," returned Bax.

" I suppose that the prisoner Meagles alluded to republicanism and French affairs? " said the attorney-general, interrogatively.

" He talked about pitching the throne to the devil," responded Mr. Bax; " and he declared that the English people was fools not to imitate the French."

" And the prisoner Melmoth, did he give his assent to those observations? " asked the attorney-general.

" Oh, he was quite as bad as t'other, and said as how that all kings was tyrants," replied the constable.

" That will do, Mr. Bax," said the great law-officer. " You have given your evidence in a very straightforward, candid, and praiseworthy manner; and if the prisoners will allow me to offer them a suggestion, I should advise that they do not aggravate their guilt by any useless bravado, such as cross-examining the witness, but that they at once throw themselves on the mercy of the government."

" Mercy, indeed! " echoed Meagles, with a bitter tone and a disdainful manner. " No, sir, we are well aware that mercy exists not in the quarter where you would persuade us to look for it; but we will see whether there be anything like justice in this tribunal before which we now stand. I presume that the moment has now arrived for the cross-examination of this witness? "

" Yes, if you persist in a course so vitally prejudicial to your own interests," observed the attorney-general.

Meagles condescended not to vouchsafe any reply to the remark, but, turning toward Mr. Bax, he said, " Upon your oath, your solemn oath, have you told the truth? "

" That question cannot be allowed," interposed the attorney-general. " If Mr. Bax should admit that he has spoken falsely, he would be liable to a prosecution for perjury, and no witness can be allowed to criminate himself."

" Then I will ask him," exclaimed Meagles, " whether my fellow prisoner and myself did not seek him at his own house and require his assistance to rescue a young lady — "

" I really cannot permit this line of cross-examination," cried the attorney-general. " While pretending to ask a question, you are entering upon matter quite extraneous —"

" I will show you in a moment, sir," interrupted Meagles, " how the case of the young lady alluded to is intimately associated with the causes of my arrest and that of my fellow prisoner."

" No young lady has been specifically mentioned in the evidence," replied the attorney-general, doggedly, " and

therefore I cannot permit you to conjure up the phantom of such a young lady to suit your own particular purposes."

"But it was in consequence of the vile persecution of this young lady by the Prince of Wales," exclaimed Meagles, "that — "

"No persecution was mentioned by the witness Bax," said the law-officer. "Keep to his evidence, sir, and cross-question him thereupon."

"I will ask him, then," resumed Meagles, beginning to be much perplexed by the nature of the proceedings, "whether I did not in the first instance call upon him to accompany me to Mrs. Brace's house — "

"This certainly is most irrelevant," interposed the chief magistrate.

"Most decidedly," added the under-secretary. "It cannot be tolerated for a moment. It is against all rule — "

"And law," observed the chief magistrate.

"And precedent," exclaimed the attorney-general.

"Then I had better hold my peace," cried Meagles, in a tone of extreme bitterness; "for I see plainly enough that you are bent upon accomplishing our ruin. Melmoth, my good friend," he added, turning toward the working man, "I should advise you to abandon all hope of profiting by the cross-examination of that perjured scoundrel."

"Stand aside, Mr. Bax," exclaimed the attorney-general, unable to conceal his delight at having thus so easily got rid of any further opposition to the witness. "Come, let your companions be sworn."

The other two constables accordingly stood forward, and each, in his turn, deposed to the truth of the statement already made by Mr. Bax, the attorney-general putting to them such leading questions that they could not possibly mistake the answers which he was desirous of eliciting. Meagles and Melmoth both endeavoured to cross-examine them, but at every query they put, the attorney-general objected. One question was "irregular," another was "irrelevant," a third was entirely in opposition to "all precedent," and a fourth came within the style of cross-examination which some very learned judge who lived a few centuries back, in a very barbarian age, had thought proper to disallow and prohibit. The result of all the objections thus raised by the attorney-general was that the witnesses

were not permitted to respond to a single query calculated to shake their testimony or throw any real light upon the proceedings.

Mr. Prescott was now required to read over the depositions, which he did in a singsong, parish-clerk kind of a tone, doubtless to the great edification of the government officials, but to the unmitigated disgust of the prisoners, who had not as yet seen a glimpse of common sense or common justice throughout the entire proceeding.

The attorney-general and the chief magistrate then drew up a report to the effect that, whereas certain evil-disposed, wicked, and seditious persons, to wit, Timothy Meagles and James Melmoth, not having the fear of God before their eyes, and instigated by the devil, had conspired, did conspire, and were found conspiring against the throne and kingly authority of these realms; and, moreover, did compass, imagine, conceive, intend, project, devise, purpose, and purport to depose his most Gracious Majesty from the style, title, and dignity of sovereign of the British dominions; and whereas in order to accomplish, perform, and devise, and do what they had so wickedly compassed, imagined, conceived, intended, projected, purposed, and purported, they did in the first place assume disorderly and seditious looks and evil-intentioned mien in the public streets, to the great dismay, consternation, and alarm of certain of his Majesty's loving and dutiful subjects, thereby endangering the peace of these realms, and the peace of these realms being so endangered; and whereas the said Timothy Meagles and James Melmoth, while thus wickedly and seditiously menacing the state with civil war, did raise their arms against the person of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, thereby committing certain wicked and seditious acts of assault and battery on the sacred person of the heir apparent to the throne of these realms; and whereas it had been held that the raising of arms is the same as appearing in arms, and that therefore the said wicked and evil-disposed persons, Timothy Meagles and James Melmoth, were proven to have appeared in arms for certain treasonable and rebellious purposes against their sovereign lord the king; and whereas, upon their own admission, they did belong to certain secret, illegal, and unlawful societies, and that they had also communicated and conversed by means of certain secret signs

in the presence of certain of his Majesty's civil authorities engaged in examining into all these and other sundry and divers charges; and whereas it was established by evidence that the said Timothy Meagles and James Melmoth were notoriously disaffected, seditious, wickedly disposed, and riotous persons, not having the fear of God before their eyes, but instigated by the devil; and whereas the political guarantees commonly known as the habeas corpus act were at this time suspended in order that powers might be invested in the hands of his Majesty's government to repress sedition and maintain peace and order within these realms; therefore the undersigned, his Majesty's attorney-general and his Majesty's chief magistrate of the police, did thereby recommend that the aforesaid Timothy Meagles and James Melmoth should be summarily dealt with as disorderly characters and evil-disposed persons, etc.

This precious document, having been duly drawn up and signed, was attested by the under-secretary and forthwith despatched to the Foreign Office where the Cabinet Council was sitting, in order that it might receive the signature of the secretary of state. Extreme promptitude characterized the whole proceedings; and when the document was returned in the space of ten minutes with the name of the home minister attached to it, the under-secretary at once directed that Meagles and Melmoth should be deported from the country without delay.

Vainly did the prisoners remonstrate against this tyrannical conduct, vainly did they demand to be heard in explanation of the transaction which had led to their arrest, and with equal fruitlessness did they request to be regularly committed for trial. Stern and inexorable negatives were the only response they could elicit; for the suspension of the habeas corpus act gave the government illimitable powers, and those powers were not likely to be used either leniently or humanely by the Ministers of that accursed tyrant, George III.

It was scarcely dusk in the evening of this memorable day when Tim Meagles and James Melmoth were thrust, handcuffed and carefully guarded, into a post-chaise which received them at the door of the Home Office. The only indulgence they could obtain was a promise that on their arrival at Woolwich, which was the immediate place of their

destination, they should be allowed to write a few lines to inform their relatives or friends "that they had been detected in treasonable designs against the sovereign, but that through the leniency of the paternal government they were permitted to repair without delay to North America, on condition that they never again return to their native land."

It would be difficult to describe the feelings of the two prisoners, as they found themselves being whirled rapidly along the road toward Woolwich, with chains upon their hands and a couple of armed peace-officers seated opposite to them in the vehicle.

Melmoth thought of his poor wife and children, and the cold shudder of despair passed through his entire frame every time he asked himself what was now to become of them. His wife loved him tenderly, and this sudden and unexpected separation might be the death of her, sickly as she was. At all events, even if she should survive the blow, she was already too weak in health and would become too deeply depressed in spirits to be enabled to toil for the maintenance of herself and children. Oh, these reflections were maddening, maddening; and more than once the strong man groaned aloud, during the rapid and brief journey to Woolwich, as the whole current of his blood appeared to rush suddenly to his heart and brain under the influence of those harrowing thoughts.

And Meagles, how did he bear his misfortune? Somewhat more calmly and philosophically, because he had no wife and children upon whose heads this calamity would rebound. The feelings which animated his breast were, moreover, of a bitter, burning hatred against the treacherous prince, rather than of a softer nature such as a husband and a father would have experienced. Nevertheless, he sighed, profoundly sighed, as he thought of poor Rose Foster; and tears stole down his cheeks as he wondered what now would become of the friendless, persecuted orphan.

To both Meagles and Melmoth the whole adventure wore at times the aspect of a dream. Its suddenness, the hurry of the incidents through which they had passed, the extraordinary change that a few hours had effected in their circumstances, and the tremendous engine of despotism which in "merry England" had been set in motion to

crush and annihilate them, — all seemed the details of a fantastic vision rather than the consecutive occurrences of stern reality.

At the Green Man at Blackheath the chaise halted for a few minutes; but the prisoners were not suffered to alight, nor did their custodians leave them. The postilion entered the tap belonging to the establishment, to procure some refreshments, and from that place came the voices of revellers, singing in chorus over their ale. The song was one about " British freedom," and it contained a verse vowing devotion to " our good King George." Alas! those thoughtless beings paused not to reflect that British liberty was a mere idle phantom, cheating the eye and deluding the heart, and that their king was one of the most cold-blooded tyrants that ever the Almighty sent upon the earth to be a scourge and a curse to erring mortals.

On went the chaise again, and at length the lights of Woolwich gleamed in the distance. Another quarter of an hour, and the vehicle rolled into the town, proceeding straight to the dockyard. There it stopped; the two prisoners were ordered to alight, and they were conducted into a little office, where, their manacles being removed, they were informed that they were at liberty to write the letters to their friends, according to the promise made to them at the Home Office. It was, however, represented to them by the senior peace-officer, to whose charge they had been entrusted, that the epistles must be couched in the sense already suggested, and that no comment upon the proceedings would be allowed. In a word, they were not to detail the facts according to the truth, but according to the version which had been recorded in the depositions; and the epistle which each prisoner wrote was therefore circumscribed to a few lines. That of Tim Meagles was addressed to Mrs. Piggleberry, who he was well aware would lose no time in communicating its contents to Lady Lade; and that of James Melmoth was written to his poor wife.

When the letters were finished, the senior peace-officer took charge of them, with a promise that they should be delivered as early as possible in the morning; and the two prisoners, having been remanacled, were consigned to the care of a corporal and four soldiers, by whom they were marched down to the wharf.

The evening was very dark; neither moon nor star shone upon the face of heaven, and the obscurity was only broken by the lights gleaming in the windows of the arsenal and in the ships moored off the shore.

The soldiers conducted Meagles and the working man, both of whom were still handcuffed, down the slippery steps leading to the river; and at the bottom of the flight a boat was waiting, manned by six sailors under the command of a midshipman. The moment the soldiers and their two prisoners had entered the boat, it pulled off and rowed in the direction of a large ship which lay at a short distance, and through the port-holes of which lights were gleaming, so that it appeared as if a slightly curving row of lamps were suspended over the dark bosom of the river.

It was now by an effort of extraordinary skill, the most remarkable feature of which was the noiselessness wherewith it was accomplished, that James Melmoth succeeded in slipping off his manacles; but he held them in such a manner that their occasional clinking should prevent any suspicion of their removal.

In a few minutes the boat ran alongside the man-of-war which lay so still and stately upon the river, and the two captives were ordered to ascend the accommodation-ladder to the deck.

Meagles went first; but scarcely had he mounted half a dozen steps when a loud splash was heard, instantaneously followed by ejaculations of mingled terror and amazement from the soldiers and the sailors in the boat.

"Watch where he rises, and fire," exclaimed the corporal.

"He has dived, underneath the ship itself, perhaps," cried one of the private soldiers.

And then arose on board the man-of-war, echoing from stem to stern, the cry of "Some one overboard!" and the ship, a moment before so silent, was now a scene of agitation and excitement throughout.

All this was the work of a few instants; but Meagles had immediately comprehended the startling truth that his late companion in captivity had made a desperate effort and dared a tremendous risk in order to escape from his persecutors.

"God send him success!" muttered Tim, as a couple of sailors hurried him up the accommodation-ladder to the

deck, where he was given in charge to the officer of marines.

Meantime all the boats were lowered, and lanterns were hung over the ship's sides; and the marines on deck were prepared to fire at Melmoth should he, upon reappearing above the water, seem to have any chance of escaping from the galleys now rowing about in search of him. The tidings of his escape were communicated to the adjacent vessels and likewise to the shore; and that portion of the river became completely illuminated with the lanterns hung out by the shipping and along the wharves.

But all these measures were vain and useless. James Melmoth reappeared not to the view of those who were thus hunting him with bloodhound eagerness; and the impression soon became general that he must have perished in his desperate attempt.

Meagles shared in this belief, and great as his own afflictions were, he nevertheless had leisure and feeling enough to heave a sigh and drop a tear to the memory of the persecuted working man.

On the following morning, soon after sunrise, the *Diana* frigate weighed anchor; and, her white canvas filling with a strong and favourable wind, she stood gallantly down the river, bearing away, within the prisonage of her wooden walls, the once dashing, rollicking, intrepid, and adventure-loving Tim Meagles.

CHAPTER IX

THE ROYAL LOVER'S VICTIM

We must now conduct our readers to an apartment in a little villa belonging to the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire and situated in the vicinity of Aylesbury.

This room to which we have just alluded was in a state of confusion, while some of its features indicated, alas! too plainly, the mental condition of that lovely creature who was its occupant. For there were bars to the windows and a strong iron grating over the fireplace; the door, which was chained outside, had a small trap to enable the physician, the nurse, or other attendants to satisfy themselves from time to time as to what the patient was doing within; and all the furniture was so massive as to defy even the maniac strength which some sudden inclination for mischief might prompt to havoc and destructiveness. The chairs were, however, all scattered pell-mell about, some overturned, one piled upon another; the carpet was rolled away from a portion of the floor; the drawers were all open, and various articles of female apparel were lying here and there.

But who is she, that lovely young woman, with her attire hanging negligently about her and her hair in disorder? Upon her head she wears a crown cut out of paper, and in her hand she carries a sceptre formed of the same material. There is a mingling of melancholy and wildness in her looks, a glitter of restlessness combined with an expression of touching pathos, evincing the sad truth that the flame of intellect burns steadily no longer, although the warmth of feeling be still the same.

Oh, whither does her imagination wander, like a troubled dove unable to find its ark? Alas! alas! for that unhappy girl whose mind has become a chimera exercising the baleful

influence of the Medusa-head to petrify all the wholesome thoughts that may chance to look in upon her soul!

For that same imagination which so lately proved the active element of her life's happiness and made her love the source of so many Eden-like joys, which decked fancy's temples with the fairest and brightest flowers, and revelled in the wildest and most romantic castle-building upon the enchanted ground of a foreshadowed future, this same imagination it is that now substitutes wretched phantoms for glowing poesy and the silliest dreams for the most exalted imagery. Yes, that ethereal spirit which was wont to soar like the flight of eagles above the clouds and penetrate even unto the realms of God's own glory, has now changed into the unwholesome vapour of a will-o'-the-wisp ignobly coursing along the surface of the quagmires of the world.

But, oh, what emotion of the hidden being brings that deep flush at one instant to her cheeks, her neck, and her bosom, and in another moment chases away the roseate glow and leaves her pale as a marble statue?

Now an indescribable dignity pervades that superb creature, as she seats herself upon a table, fancying it a throne, and places her feet upon a chair, believing it a royal footstool. For some minutes she remains still and queenlike, as if gazing upon a troop of courtiers kneeling around her. The delusion fills her with happiness, a flood of joy pours in unto her soul, her eyes light up magnificently, her countenance glows with the lustre and the richness of animation, her neck arches grandly, and her bosom swells with sensations of gratified ambition and proud triumph.

Suddenly a thought appears to strike her. 'Tis a momentary gleam of reason that darts athwart her brain, as the flashing levin breaks on a night of gloom; and, oh, how instantaneously the brightness passes away from her features and the cloud comes and settles thereon! For that gleam of intelligence, vivid as it is evanescent, dissipates her joyous illusion in a moment; and although her ideas relapse into chaos and confusion, yet does some sad and mournful impression, some strange and lurking misgiving, remain uppermost in her mind, and, in obedience thereto, she slowly takes off her crown and examines it, together with her sceptre. Intently, oh, how intently she gazes upon those objects; then her look becomes frightened, like that of an

innocent maiden struck by a first suspicion of her lover's treachery. Now her gaze is riveted upon the royal symbols again; and then bewilderment, terror, and awe gradually arise and mingle in her regard, like the look which we can fancy Eve to have sent forth from the gates of her Eden into the dimness of that unknown world upon whose face she was doomed to enter.

" Oh, is this the crown which I once hoped to wear, and is this the sceptre which I believed myself destined to wield? " exclaimed poor Octavia Clarendon, her lips at length expressing the cruel doubts which had sprung up in her soul. " No, no; it was to be a crown covered with jewels and glistening with gems, and a sceptre of gold that would not break so easily as this. But my beloved one will soon appear and bring me the crown and the sceptre which he promised. Oh, why does he not come immediately, for I have already waited long and patiently for my prince. Sometimes I think that I am a strange, wild, and fanciful girl, and all my ideas, though plain enough, nevertheless glitter in confusion like the spangles upon a robe that is shaken, or like the gleaming meteors in the north when the polar night puts forth its pomps and splendours. But, oh, this confusion is brilliantly beautiful, and amidst it all I behold my prince clad in royal garments and extending his arms toward me. Nevertheless," she continued, with a reflective air and in a tone of deeper pathos, " they will not let me hasten forward to meet him. Oh, why is this? Wherefore are we separated? Let me fly to his arms, or my soul will become a fountain evermore to gush with bitter tears. I will make the very air burn with my passionate sighs, if they keep me any longer from my prince."

Suddenly her entire manner changed: the melting beauty of her eyes gave place to a wild and terrible lustre, which shot forth like lightning-shafts; her countenance became colourless, ghastly, and distorted with anguish; and her bosom rose and fell with a violence and a rapidity evincing that a profound agitation raged within.

" Away, ye vile and despicable baubles! " she exclaimed, starting from her seat on the table, and dashing the paper crown and sceptre upon the floor. " Ye are the emblems of that deceit and cruelty and treachery which made me what I am. Oh, thou demon-hearted prince, hast thou no mercy,

no compassion, no sympathy for thy wronged and ruined Octavia? Wherefore hast thou blighted all the hopes of my youth? Why hast thou carried desolation and woe into the sanctuary of that heart which was filled with love for thee? O God! do thy thunders sleep? O Heaven! hast thou no lightnings left? Give me the wand of an enchantress and I will bring an universal deluge on the earth, that he may be swept away from the theatre of his crimes, yes, even though myself and all the world suffer annihilation at the same moment. Or let the mountains fall upon the nations, and crush the entire human species back, back into its pristine elements, so that he may perish miserably, miserably. Would that my words were daggers or that my looks were arrows, that they might go forth and pierce him to the heart. Revenge, revenge! shall I not be blessed with a full, complete, and crowning revenge for all my wrongs? Oh, let me think only of revenge! Let it be my reverie by day and my dream by night. Yes, I will cherish thee, thou fiendlike idea, as I once cherished the love that hath turned to this implacable hatred. I will cherish thee as I would nurture an innocent babe, were I a mother. I will cherish thee, oh, I will cherish thee as the religionist clings to his hope of salvation. Thou shalt wall me around and imprison me in one circle of sensations, thou shalt confine me to the narrow space of one idea, even as the Roman vestal, when seduced from her duty by the blandishments of love, was enclosed in a tomb of massive masonry. And yet, oh, my God, could I hurt that man whom I have adored and worshipped? Could I without emotion behold him dying or dead at my feet? No, no, never!"

And as the wretched girl thus shrieked wildly forth, a strong shudder passed through her frame, and she fell on her knees, joining her hands and clasping them convulsively at the same time.

"O ruined, heart-riven creature that I am!" she said, in a low voice fraught with a pathos ineffably touching and tenderly musical; "wherefore have my own feelings become scorpions to sting and scourges to lacerate my bruised and wounded soul? Will Heaven send no anodyne to soothe and heal? Oh, yes, for Heaven is kind and merciful and good, and blesses the parched flowers of the garden with its reviving dew. Hear, then, my prayer, O Providence!" she

exclaimed, raising her eyes with a holy earnestness, "and give me hope, give me comfort, give me happiness. Alas! alas! no solace comes; my brain reels, I suffer excruciating agonies in the hell of mine own thoughts, ghastly forms rise up before me, hideous shapes surround me. Adieu, adieu to all refuge against myself. Miserable, miserable girl that I am, the torrent of my ideas whirls me along in a flood of burning lava. Avaunt, ye harrowing recollections, begone, ye racking memories! Oh, that the past were a blank, that the present were unfelt, unknown, and that I might waken to the view of a smiling future's roseate dawn! But this may not be: I am lost, lost, beyond all redemption lost. Darkness closes in around me, a stupendous blackness, deeper than a funeral pall, is enveloping me. Earth and heaven are passing away; all is an abyss, into which I am precipitating. Powers of Heaven! will ye not stay my headlong flight? Oh, mercy! mercy! mercy!"

And covering her face with her hands, Octavia became convulsed with grief.

The ravings of her tongue ceased, but her soul was agitated like the ocean when the storm sweeps over it. Upon her knees did she still remain, strong spasms shooting through the limbs that were thus bent under her, and likewise through the arms which had been wont to clasp the neck of her royal seducer.

For some minutes did she thus endure the unspeakable anguish of thoughts and fancies and imaginings the nature of which no human conjecture can probe; but at length she slowly removed her hands from her countenance, and gradually raised herself up from her kneeling posture.

Then, sinking on a chair, she fell into a reverie so deep, so profound, that her physical as well as her moral nature was locked up in the thoughts which now absorbed her entire being. Motionless was she as the sculptured marble; not a finger moved, her bosom heaved not to the respiration, and her lips remained slightly apart as they were at the instant when this waking trance seized upon her. So passionless was the repose of her countenance, so fixed were the eyes, so still was every feature, that had it not been for the faint shade of the pink upon her cheeks, she would have cheated the gaze of a beholder into the belief that she was indeed a statue. From the depths of her soul, whatever thoughts

were agitating there, not a ripple reached the marble surface of her features; and if it were despair that thus retained her limbs and looks spellbound, it must have been that blank numbness which freezes every sense with the ice-chill of its utter hopelessness.

Upwards of an hour had passed during which Octavia Clarendon's mind and conduct underwent the various changes which we have endeavoured to describe in this chapter; and the reader has observed that in one mood she fancied herself a princess or a queen, in another, she saw the delusion of that belief; now she retained her love for her seducer, whose speedy arrival she expected, and then she gave way to sentiments of the most implacable hatred toward him; now she laboured under a fearful excitement, and then she fell into a reverie which held her motionless and still as death.

But during the hour which had thus passed away, the little trap or wicket in the door of the chamber had been gently lifted more than once; and an old woman, with a benevolent countenance, had looked anxiously but cautiously into the apartment. Then, having satisfied herself that Octavia was inflicting no injury upon her own person, the female withdrew, closing the wicket as gently as she had opened it.

The unfortunate young lady had remained upwards of twenty minutes in that deep, deep reverie which we have described above, and which was the most melancholy of all the varied phases wherein her mental aberration showed itself; twenty minutes of fathomless meditation, in which the soul and the body both looked inwardly and saw nothing outwardly.

It was about the expiration of this interval that the wicket was raised noiselessly again, and first the countenance of the old woman appeared, and then a young and lovely face, but on every lineament of which was expressed the deepest grief.

It was Pauline, who now beheld her sister for the first time since the terrible calamity had overtaken the victim of royal lust and perfidy.

The door was opened softly, and the younger Miss Clarendon entered the room alone, the door being immediately closed behind her.

Subduing by a tremendous effort the emotions which struggled to burst forth and which nearly choked her, Pauline laid her hand gently upon Octavia's shoulder. The unfortunate young lady awoke, as it were, with a sudden start from her profound reverie, and looking up into Pauline's countenance, she gazed long and intently on those features which she had kissed a thousand, thousand times, but which she remembered not now.

"Do you not recollect me, dearest, dearest Octavia?" asked Pauline, in a faint and scarcely audible tone; and she would have thrown herself upon her sister's neck and wept upon her bosom, had she not been emphatically enjoined to abstain from any demonstration of feeling calculated to excite the unfortunate girl.

"Yes, I recollect you," responded Octavia, after a long pause, during which she continued to gaze earnestly up into her sister's face: "you are a good genius who has often visited me in my dreams and kissed me when I was asleep. I am not afraid of you, as I am of other people who present themselves before me. You are the goddess of sweet flowers, and bright sunbeams, and everything joyous and glad; and I have already learned to love you, though this is the first time that I have seen you save in the visions of the night. But oh, wherefore do you weep, angel that you are?" cried Octavia, starting to her feet and pressing her sister's hand tenderly.

For the tears rained in torrents down Pauline's cheeks.

"Ah! now I perceive that it is not only mortals who weep," continued Octavia, in a tone of ineffable sadness, which made her sister's tears flow more thickly and fast, "but the good beings who live in heaven can likewise shed those pearly drops. But why do you weep now? Is it for me that you are mournful? Oh, weep on, then, weep on, sweet angel, for I am unhappy, very, very unhappy."

And, as she spoke, she dropped in a listless manner the hand of her sister, who, now utterly unable to resist the strong current of her emotions, sank upon a chair convulsed with grief.

"This is indeed most singular," said Octavia, in a musing tone, as her eyes were fixed compassionately upon her sister, that sister whom she did not recognize. "It was but last night I dreamed that you came to see me; and I fancied that

you were seized with a sudden and violent sorrow. For methought that you sat down by my bedside, and took my hand, and began to talk to me upon subjects to which I paid little heed at first, but which gradually enticed my attention, and then enthralled it altogether. And it appeared to me that you told me many things which had happened when I was a little child and which I had since forgotten; and so pleasing, so touching, and so truthful was your language, that I imagined myself once more a child, chasing the butterfly through the green fields, with my straw hat hanging half-off my head, and my tiny feet scarcely pressing down the daisies and buttercups over which they glancingly sped. And then you spoke of home, yes, of home, a home that I once had, where kind faces smiled upon me, and kind hands pressed mine, and kind voices murmured God's blessing in my ear; and again were your words so truthful and so striking that I wept at those reminiscences which were thus conjured up. But I have no home now," added Octavia, heaving a profound sigh, " for this odious chamber cannot be called my home. No, no, 'tis a prison, a vile prison. Behold the bars at the windows, the iron grating over that fireplace, the padlocks to hold that grating fast, the door of the room always kept locked — Yes, 'tis a prison, a vile prison — Merciful God! 'tis not the home of my childhood — Oh, no, no! "

And having thus become suddenly excited by the unhappy turn which the current of her thoughts took all in a moment, Octavia clasped her hands convulsively, while her countenance, a few moments before completely unruffled, showed by its workings how poignant were the spasms that rent her heart.

" Octavia, Octavia, dearest Octavia! " exclaimed Pauline, unable to restrain her feelings any longer, but clasping her sister to her bosom. " Oh, do you not recognize me? Do you not know me, my beloved Octavia? "

" Ah! what name is that which you have mentioned? " cried the unhappy lady, tearing herself from Pauline's embrace, and speaking in a quick, agitated manner. " Methinks that name is familiar to me — yes, I have heard it before — Oh, breathe it again, for it sounds softly and sweetly upon your lips."

And the elder sister gazed with a winning tenderness,

strangely and painfully commingled with vacancy, upon the countenance of the younger, whose heart was too full to allow her tongue to give utterance to a word.

"Oh, why will you not breathe that name once more?" asked the victim of royal treachery, her voice becoming more melting and touchingly plaintive than ever. "If I could do you a pleasure in so simple and easy a manner, I should not hesitate."

"Nor I, nor I, beloved Octavia," exclaimed Pauline, almost suffocated with the sobs that rent her breast; "only it drives me mad —"

"Mad!" ejaculated the elder sister, catching up the word which Pauline so unwittingly and so unfortunately let fall, "mad!" repeated Octavia, again becoming fearfully excited. "Oh, all the world are mad save myself. Ha! ha! I laugh merrily, merrily, when I think how absurd and ridiculous every living soul renders himself while endeavouring to look wise and sensible. There is an old gentleman with a white head who comes to see me sometimes; and he puts the silliest questions, makes the most preposterous remarks, and surveys me with the most laughable affectation of sympathy and compassion. Then he fancies himself a doctor and feels my pulse; and I humour him, poor old gentleman, as well as I can, because I know that he is mad and cannot be held responsible for his actions. At another time an old woman comes to see me, and she is mad also. But she does not know it, she does not even suspect it; and it is by endeavouring to appear sane that she renders herself ridiculous. Poor old thing! I have more than once laughed in her face, but I have been sorry for it afterward. All sadness, except that which arises from sin, is sacred; and therefore when I behold the melancholy looks of that gentleman who believes himself a doctor and of this woman who fancies herself a nurse, I ought to be serious. It is wrong of me to laugh, but I cannot always help it. And now, my dear friend, for I do not know your name," continued Octavia, approaching close up to Pauline and gazing upon her countenance with an expression of melancholy interest, though still commingled with that vacancy which denoted reason's aberration, "and now, my dear friend," she said, sinking her voice to a low and mysterious whisper, "pardon me if I tell you a truth that may not be altogether welcome,

but believe me, my dear friend, when I assure you that you yourself are as mad as any person in the whole world."

Thus speaking, Octavia turned lightly away; and picking up her paper crown, she proceeded to put it straight, singing the while a plaintive air in a low tone and musing manner.

Several minutes elapsed, during which the unhappy young lady appeared to forget that any one was present in the room; but all this time her sister, with feelings stretched to almost the extreme power of their tension, was standing by and contemplating her.

Presently the door opened gently, and the Duchess of Devonshire made her appearance.

Then Octavia, placing the crown upon her head and grasping the paper sceptre, seated herself on the table once more; and, after surveying her sister and the duchess with a mingled dignity and sternness for nearly a minute, she commanded them to quit her presence.

Pauline would have lingered to converse with Octavia again, to weep over her, to embrace her, and to endeavour to resuscitate fond memories in her mind; but Georgiana, well knowing how terrific were the paroxysms of excitement which seized upon the unfortunate young lady when contradicted or thwarted, dragged rather than led the distressed and weeping Pauline away from the apartment.

And Octavia was left to that solitude which her disordered imagination filled with a thousand phantasms; but though alone in that chamber, she was not friendless nor deserted in the villa, for there had Pauline now taken up her abode, by the consent of the really kind and generous-hearted Duchess of Devonshire.

CHAPTER X

A HUSBAND'S SELF-MARTYRDOM

FOUR or five days had elapsed since that tremendous scene at the mansion of the Earl of Desborough, which revealed to this nobleman and his wife the astounding fact that the criminal Ramsey was their guest, — a scene which led to the prompt departure of that treacherous individual, and threw the countess upon a sick-bed.

During that interval the earl had been unremitting in his attentions to Eleanor. Hour after hour did he pass by her bedside, and it was his hand that smoothed her pillow, administered her medicine, and bathed her feverish, throbbing brows.

At first her senses wandered and delirium seized upon her, and on those occasions the earl was careful to exclude the attendants from the room, for he naturally feared lest she should make revelations of a character destructive alike to his reputation and her own.

But it was not merely to keep a constant watch over her that the earl passed long days and held his vigils by the bedside of the countess. No, his motives were less selfish and far more estimable; for he loved that woman who had deceived him, he loved, adored, worshipped her.

And as he gradually beheld the danger passing away, convalescence approaching, and her thoughts settling down into their proper channels, his heart rejoiced and he experienced a happiness greater than any he had long known; for as he contemplated that countenance so eminently handsome, and swept with his looks that form so exquisitely symmetrical as it lay stretched on the couch, the snowy bedclothes affording indications of the contours of the shape and marking the superb length of limb and all the flowing

outlines, — as he thus contemplated the lovely Eleanor, we say, he felt that it would indeed be hard for her to die in the vigour of her years and the meridian of her heart's glowing passions.

Thus was it that this good nobleman, who lived only for the sake of that woman whom he adored, and whose happiness he would have gladly consummated by the sacrifice of his own, thus was it that he watched, day and night, by her bedside; and after her senses had returned, whenever she opened her eyes they encountered the melting, tender, and affectionate looks of that husband whom she had wronged so foully.

But so soon as Eleanor was enabled to collect her thoughts sufficiently to ponder upon everything which had occurred on that memorable day when the thunderbolt fell and burst at her feet, she began to ask herself, over and over again, whether she had betrayed the one dread secret to her husband. In fact, was he aware that Ramsey had been her paramour? Had she betrayed herself in the ineffable anguish of that moment when the canvas revealed to her the countenance of the criminal, or did the earl imagine then and still believe that her emotions at the time and her subsequent illness were merely the results of a sudden shock very naturally experienced under such painful circumstances?

The longer the countess reflected upon these matters, the more did she endeavour to persuade herself that her adultery was unsuspected by her husband. But in spite of the assiduousness and the pertinacity with which she endeavoured to reason her mind into this belief, there was a constant terror, an incessant misgiving lurking at the bottom of her soul, a feeling of uneasiness which she vainly, vainly sought to smother.

When she looked furtively at her husband at moments when he either fancied she was sleeping or when he himself had fallen into a reverie, the suspicion that she read the worst in his melancholy, pensive features would amount almost to a conviction in her mind; and then she thought she could understand all the forgiving generosity of his behaviour, all the noble-hearted devotion which made him endure everything for her sake.

But when they were alone together, a nervous trembling would come over her as she lay on the bed of sickness, and

at the first word which on those occasions fell from his lips she would start convulsively, as if some tremendous accusation were about to be made against her. At the same time the colour would come and go upon her cheeks with strange rapidity; and while at one moment her veins would appear to run with lightning, at another the blood would seem to freeze in its crimson channels.

The earl soon saw what was passing in her mind, and, animated by that compassion and that love which influenced all his conduct toward her, he was resolved to put a speedy end to a state of suspense, misgiving, and alarm, so torturing to her whom he adored despite of all she had done outrageous to his dignity as a husband and his feelings as a man.

It was on the fifth morning after the terrific explosion effected by the exhibition of George Woodfall's picture, and at about the hour of noon, that the Countess of Desborough was permitted by her physicians to rise from her couch for a little while.

Attired in an elegant *déshabillé*, the beauteous patrician lady was now reclining in an armchair placed at a short distance from the cheerful fire in her bedroom; and when the earl was readmitted to the chamber and the attendants had withdrawn, he availed himself of this opportunity to make revelations which were perhaps less anticipated by his wife than they are by any one of the two hundred thousand readers of this narrative.

"My dearest Eleanor," he said, "the moment has now arrived when it becomes necessary that we should have some serious conversation together."

"Ah! the dreaded moment!" murmured the countess, in a hurried and agitated undertone, bounding at the same time upon her chair as if she were suddenly galvanized.

"Do not be alarmed, Eleanor, dearest Eleanor," said the earl, noticing the convulsive movement, but not hearing the half-agonized, half-despairing expression. "Let me at once and without circumlocution inform you," he added, hastily, "that I know everything and that I pardon you."

"Everything!" murmured the countess, in a faint and almost dying tone, while her heart experienced such a sinking that it seemed as if the very tide of life itself were rapidly ebbing away.

"Yes, everything!" exclaimed the nobleman. "And now, my dearest, dearest Eleanor, if you will permit me thus to address you, I implore you to be calm and tranquil; for I solemnly and sacredly assure you that my forgiveness is as complete as your error has been great."

"Oh, yes, great, great indeed!" cried the countess, bursting into tears; "great, and unpardonable."

"No, not unpardonable," responded the earl, immediately. "Immense allowances are to be made for you, Eleanor, and I believe, I hope, I am too just not to admit the full scope of the extenuation."

"You cover me with shame and confusion, you make me loathe myself," exclaimed the unhappy lady, burning blushes now spreading over the cheeks which illness had left so pale. "Oh, you are an example of everything noble-minded, generous, lofty, and good, whereas I am the piteous representative of gross unhallowed passions and of that foul crime against which the Almighty has levelled a special injunction. Yes, yes, for I am an adulteress, Francis — and yet you can pardon me!"

With these words the countess threw herself at her husband's feet, clasped his knees, and looking up toward him in an appealing manner, she seemed to wait in torturing suspense until another word from his lips could confirm the forgiveness he had already promised.

"Rise, my Eleanor, rise," exclaimed the earl, hastening to lift her from her suppliant posture, and gently compelling her to resume her seat in the armchair. Then, stooping toward her, he pressed his lips for a moment to her polished brow, murmuring, "Yes, my Eleanor, I do indeed forgive thee. By that kiss I swear that thou art pardoned."

"Oh, never did so worthless a woman possess so noble-minded a husband," exclaimed the countess, devoured by shame, remorse, and an ineffable sense of self-loathing.

"Reproach not yourself, my Eleanor," said the earl; "but listen to all that I am about to tell you, and then, perhaps," he continued, in a trembling tone, "you will think me worthy of some little amount of love — unless, indeed," he added, his voice becoming scarcely audible, "you should despise me altogether."

"No, no, impossible, Francis," cried the Countess of Desborough. "But, oh, do you not recollect that scene

which occurred between us some few weeks ago, when you explained to me the hopes which animated you and the intentions that you cherished toward me on making me your wife — "

"Yes, yes, I recollect," interrupted the nobleman. "Oh, not a word that ever passed between you and me, Eleanor, has been forgotten. On that occasion to which you allude I told you that my hope was to gain your esteem and friendship, and my determination was to surround you with the most delicate attentions and unwearied assiduities — "

"And on that same occasion, Francis," cried the countess, "I acknowledged all that was great, generous, and noble in your conduct, and I assured you solemnly," she added, casting down her eyes and blushing deeply, "I assured you that I was then as pure and chaste a virgin as the infant babe. Yes, despite of the impassioned ardour of my nature, despite of those fervent longings which at times almost maddened me, I was still innocent in body, although perhaps impure in mind and in thoughts. And, oh, if since that period I have succumbed to temptation, opportunity, the irresistible force of circumstances, if I have yielded to all of these, and have lost my honour as well as your confidence and my own self-respect, oh, have pity upon me, have mercy, Francis, for I had struggled long and powerfully. Heaven knows how desperate were the efforts which for years I had made to repel temptation and guard mine innocence."

"I have pitied you, my Eleanor," exclaimed the earl, "and I have pardoned you. Merciful God! all that has happened I have well deserved and should have foreseen. 'Twas I who deserved to be blamed, not you. With the lamentable physical misfortune which rendered me unfit for marriage, well knowing, in fact, that ten thousand sources of misery would eventually be summed up in the terrible word impotency, I was a wretch to have induced a young, handsome, and impassioned woman to accompany me to the altar. Oh, as I have before explained the infernal mockery, 'twas binding to the side of a corpse a being in whose veins coursed the rich warm blood of a vigorous youth. But, O Eleanor, Eleanor! I have been tremendously punished, and I have likewise endeavoured to make you an atonement, even though your dishonour and my infamy were involved

therein. Now do you begin to understand any portion of my recent conduct?"

"Yes, yes, oh, yes," ejaculated the countess, a light suddenly breaking in upon her brain. "That night which the Prince of Wales passed in this house —"

"Oh, will you not despise me, Eleanor, I again ask?" cried the Earl of Desborough, his tone, his looks, and his manner indicating how deep was the excitement which was growing upon him. "But you shall first hear me, and then answer deliberately," he continued, without affording his wife time to respond to the query just put. "You remember that morning when the Duchess of Devonshire called upon you after her return from Scotland —"

"Great Heaven! a thought strikes me," interrupted the countess, an awful trembling seizing upon her entire frame and making every limb quiver as if with an intense chill. "Yes, that conversation which passed between the duchess and myself —"

"I overheard it all," said the nobleman, in a hoarse, thick tone.

"And you did not curse me! You did not invoke Heaven's vengeance upon my head!" shrieked forth the wretched Eleanor. "O God! how deeply, deeply I have wronged you, Francis, in so many, many different ways; and yet you have not spurned me from you, you have not thrust me forth as you would the snake which, having been warmed at your hearth, uprears its head to sting you."

"Have I not told you that I love you, that I adore you, Eleanor?" exclaimed the earl; "and are you not aware that there is no sacrifice which I am unprepared to make in order to ensure your happiness and win some slight portion of your esteem? But let us continue the topic upon which we were entering. You remember, then, all the particulars of that interview, Eleanor, which took place between yourself and the duchess?"

"To my shame, to my confusion, to my deep, deep sorrow, do I recollect every detail," said the unhappy patrician lady. "Led on by I know not what fatal current of reflections, impelled by some demon to open my heart upon a subject which should have remained sacred, I revealed the secret to her Grace of Devonshire —"

"Torture not yourself with poignant reproaches on that

head," interrupted the earl, with the mournful calmness of a martyr. "The past cannot be recalled, and it is useless even to deplore it. But on that occasion when yourself and the Duchess of Devonshire were indulging in the mutual outpourings of a secret confidence, the name of the Prince of Wales was mentioned by you both."

"Yes, oh, yes, I remember," ejaculated the countess, a new subject for shame now presenting itself to her mind, as the conversation alluded to by her husband flashed vividly to her recollection. "Oh, how can I bear thus to remain in your presence and have all my frailties and failings, my errors and my misdeeds, marshalled in dread array before my eyes!"

"It is not to torture you, Eleanor, that I am prolonging this discourse," said the earl, "but in order that we may have certain necessary explanations, and that my conduct may be appreciated by you in the proper light. Well, then, to resume the topic, painful though it be, I must remind you that the Duchess of Devonshire revealed to your ears the details of her own seduction by the prince; and from your lips then came the avowal that his Royal Highness had bestowed his smiles upon yourself and had sought to make you his victim. After the departure of the duchess, you came into the adjoining room, where you found me. As you are already aware, I had overheard everything. Oh, the mortal agony of that hour! Ages and ages of bitterness and woe and intense suffering were concentrated therein. For you had revealed to the ears of your friend my disgrace and your misfortune; and so deep, so crushing, so overwhelming was the humiliation I experienced that I stretched out my arms to the walls to give way and cover me with their ruins. You may conceive, then, how difficult it was for me to subdue my emotions and assume a tranquil mien when you entered the apartment. No angry feeling did I entertain toward yourself, Eleanor, but the harrowing sense of mortal agony which I endured arose from the one grand, eternal conviction that I had done you a foul, nay, the foulest wrong, by becoming your husband."

"And yet, Francis," said the countess, in a faint and trembling tone, "had you killed me when I thus appeared before you, after all you had overheard, I should have merited my fate."

"Holy God, no!" ejaculated the earl. "Not for worlds would I harm a single hair of your head. But let me continue, Eleanor," he said, in a less excited voice. "During the night which followed that terrible afternoon I never slept a wink. Like another Cain, did I wander to and fro, cursing my own fate, wishing that I was dead, and yet recoiling from the idea of suicide. I reflected upon the wrong I had done you, Eleanor, and I reflected also upon the means of repairing it. By the confession which you had made to the Duchess of Devonshire, I knew that you were pure and innocent, and I knew also that you were unhappy. Nature had endowed you with strong passions, and it was natural, therefore, that you should seek to appease them. They were devouring you, and your sense of rectitude was put to a trial as unjust as it was intolerable. My God! how I pitied you, how I hated myself! Yours was a fate beyond all commiseration, mine an iniquity beyond all cursing. I vowed that something should be done: either I would lay violent hands upon myself and thus leave you free to marry another in due time, or I would actually seal my own dishonour by throwing a lover, a seducer, a paramour in your way. Yes, these were the alternatives between which I had to choose."

"Oh, it covers me with shame, it weighs me down with confusion, to hear you thus unveil your feelings concerning me," said Eleanor, bending down her head to conceal the blushes that suffused her cheeks, those blushes that overspread even her neck and her bosom.

"Heaven alone knows what a night of torture and misery I passed," continued the nobleman. "Daylight brought me no relief, and I went forth to wander in the parks in a state of mind enviable only by a wretch about to be hanged. The mendicants who passed me, and on whom I bestowed my alms, little thought how cheerfully I would have exchanged conditions with them. In the afternoon I called upon a medical practitioner, a Mr. Thurston residing in May Fair. I promised him largely, but he could give me no hope. I went away distracted. On my return home again, I resolved upon self-destruction. But better feelings sprang up in my mind at the very instant when I was about to place the muzzle of a pistol in my mouth. Then I determined to live, but to adopt that other alternative."

"Oh, this is painful, most painful!" murmured Eleanor, with a faint, hysterical shriek. "It is agonizing, excruciating."

"And yet you must hear me to the end," said the earl, rather in a tone of entreaty than of command. "Well, I resolved, as I observed, upon that other alternative whereof I have already spoken; and remembering that the Prince of Wales had already sought to make you his victim, as you expressed yourself to the Duchess of Devonshire, I determined to afford him the opportunity which he desired. With a suitable excuse I waited upon him; and his Royal Highness condescended," said the earl, bitterly, "to accept a loan of twenty thousand pounds from the man whose wife he sought to seduce. It was to receive this sum that he honoured us with his presence in the evening; and I was charmed to see that you were ravishingly beautiful and that he was dazzled and captivated. Yes, I was charmed, I say, inasmuch as the success of my stratagem appeared inevitable. His Royal Highness was easily induced to pass the night at the mansion, and I felt confident that he would not fail to profit by the incident. You remember that in the drawing-room a dispute arose respecting some particular quotation. I volunteered to fetch the book which would set the question at rest. On my return to the apartment, I saw at a glance that a complete understanding was established between yourself and the prince, or, at least, I fancied that such was the case. You retired, and I was left alone once more with his Royal Highness. Then, oh, then, a mortal sickness came over me, and I shrank aghast from the thought of my own self-martyrdom. The prince observed the change which had come over me, but I easily persuaded him that it was a sudden indisposition. A few minutes elapsed in conversation, and we separated. He retired to the apartment prepared for him, and I hastened to my own chamber. Great Heaven! what a night did I pass again! I felt that I had crucified myself, that I had planted a crown of thorns upon my own brows, that I had affixed the stigmata upon my own person. Lava boiled in my veins, hell raged in my soul, demons scourged my writhing spirit with whips of scorpions and of flame. And yet, as God is my witness, Eleanor, I swear most solemnly that never once, no, not once, did a feeling of anger arise in my breast against thee. Though confident that thou wast locked in the arms of a lover —"

"You wrong me, Francis," ejaculated the countess, solemnly. "I swear as solemnly as thou hast sworn, that the prince — "

"I know what you would say, Eleanor, dear Eleanor," interrupted the earl: "you surrendered not yourself to the arms of the prince. Oh, this I saw on the following morning, this I understood beyond all possibility of doubt when his Royal Highness came forth from his chamber. And I, who was sinking down into the very dust with humiliation, I, the husband, who had sought to pander to my own dishonour, I, who had tutored myself to make every sacrifice of feeling for thy sake, I perceived at a glance that, instead of a night of love and pleasure, the prince had experienced a bitter mortification and a cruel disappointment. Then, oh, then, an indescribable pleasure seized upon me, and hurrying to my own chamber to conceal my joy, I wept like a child."

"Merciful Heaven! Francis, how acutely have you suffered for the sake of a worthless woman!" exclaimed Eleanor, throwing herself into her husband's arms and lavishing upon him the tenderest caresses. "Oh, how sublime has been your self-devotion, how glorious your self-martyrdom! Every mortal idea of generosity is outdone by this conduct of thine; and I shall know how to thank thee, my good, kind husband, ay, and likewise to demonstrate a lasting gratitude toward you. Unless, indeed," she cried, with hysterical abruptness, as a sudden thought struck her,— and at the same time she snatched herself away from his embrace, — "unless, indeed, you loathe, detest, and abhor me, because I saved my honour from a prince only to surrender it unto a criminal whose image is now as dreadful to contemplate as his presence was once necessary to my happiness."

And, falling back into her armchair, the countess fixed her frightened, anxious, deprecating looks upon the countenance of her husband.

"Have I not already declared that it is I who must ask your pardon over and over again?" cried the earl. "But I shall not seek your forgiveness for what may not be forgiven. No, I will endeavour to prove still further how anxious, how willing I am to make every reparation for the wrong I have done you, Eleanor, by becoming your husband.

Listen, then, grant me your patience once more. What I propose is that you should institute a suit against me for cruelty, ill-treatment, and a continued series of cowardly and brutal acts toward you."

"Heavens! what mean you?" demanded the countess, all the timid entreaty of her manner changing into ineffable amazement.

"I mean that you shall obtain a decree of divorce in the Ecclesiastical Court," responded the Earl of Desborough, "and the more important decree of separation will naturally follow in the House of Lords. To none of the legal steps thus taken shall I offer any opposition. Although the judicial proceedings will brand me as a cowardly ruffian who dared to ill-treat an amiable, excellent, and beautiful woman, yet shall I secretly rejoice at being thus placed under society's ban, inasmuch as my self-martyrdom will constitute your release from those matrimonial bonds that link you to the side of a corpse. You will be free to marry again — "

"Never!" ejaculated the Countess of Desborough, once more starting to her feet, and now drawing her fine form as proudly up as if she had not just risen from a sick-bed; "never!" she repeated, in a voice which went thrillingly, though musically sweet and clear, to the very soul of her husband. "No, Francis, I am not base enough to avail myself of so much generosity, nor could I consent to the consummation of the tremendous wrong which would result toward yourself. What! consent to have you branded as a coward that could ill-treat a woman, — you who would sooner die than lift your hand against me, you who have never even uttered a harsh word in my hearing, you who have sought to make every sacrifice that an unheard-of generosity could possibly prompt! Listen to me, Francis, listen to me," said Eleanor, her voice becoming thick with emotion and her manner growing as decided as that of a heroine of masculine mind. "I am not altogether insensible to the same feelings which have hitherto governed you only, and henceforth I will endeavour to share them with you. Not that I can ever hope to outvie you in generosity, Francis, because that is impossible; but I may at least render myself more worthy of all your love than I have previously been. Again, then, do I beseech you to listen, to hear me, while I invoke Heaven to witness that from this moment forth I will be a good,

obedient, dutiful, and loving wife, yes, a loving wife, Francis, and loving, too, with an affection which will burn all the more purely and brightly and warmly because it is kindled by a spark caught from the flame that animates your noble heart."

"Is this possible, Eleanor, oh, is this possible?" murmured the earl, faltering in speech and staggering in limbs beneath the sudden weight of an overwhelming happiness. "Ah! wherefore afford me a glimpse of so joyous a paradise, only to make me recoil the more despairingly into a deeper and blacker abyss of despair?"

"Oh, he will not believe me, he has lost all confidence in me!" exclaimed the countess, joining her hands with an air of poignant wretchedness.

"Believe you!" ejaculated the earl; "yes, oh, yes, I will believe you — Only, this sudden happiness is too much — "

And, pressing his hand to his brow, he staggered forward, reeled half-around, and sank nearly senseless upon a chair.

But ere he fell completely on the carpet, he was caught in the arms of his wife; and the unmistakable fervour with which she bestowed upon him the softest and tenderest caresses carried to his soul the ecstatic conviction that his own devoted love had indeed engendered a reciprocal sentiment at last in the bosom of the woman whom he adored.

In fact, no words can express the astonishing revolution which a short half-hour had wrought in the feelings of the beauteous countess toward her husband. His noble self-martyrdom for her sake, a self-martyrdom involving all the most delicate emotions and the loftiest sentiments that ever concrete in the heart of man, had inspired her with an admiration of his truly chivalrous character which amounted to a burning enthusiasm. Instead of appearing contemptible any longer in her eyes, he shone with a godlike lustre to her imagination. Instead of seeming an object to be despised and contemned, he had suddenly become invested with every attribute to command respect and ensure an exalted worship.

Chastened, purified, and elevated in every sense by the splendid example of a man who could make the largest sacrifices to the love which he cherished, and who would even have sealed his own dire unhappiness and stamped his own indelible dishonour for the purpose of ministering to his wife's desires, oh, who can wonder if Eleanor, herself so

intelligent, so sensitive, and so just, should become an altered being under such an influence and when moved by the impulse of so much gratitude, wonder, and admiration!

And to this frame of mind was the Countess of Desborough more easily brought by the fact that her love for Ramsey had been converted into the most ineffable hatred, abhorrence, and loathing; so that she experienced an indescribable relief, amounting to the ecstasy of a pleasure hitherto unknown, in turning away, as it were, from the memory of an amour so gross and so fraught with shame, to find herself the object of a passion so spiritually pure, so holy, and so æsthetic.

CHAPTER XI

LORD AND LADY HOLDERNESS

It was six o'clock in the evening, and the domestic had just placed the dessert upon the table in the dining-room at the dwelling of Lord Holderness in Cavendish Square.

His lordship was seated with his bride in that apartment, where the thick curtains were drawn over the windows and the soft lustre shed by the lamps was reflected in the decanters filled with yellow, rosy, and dark wines. Upon the board glowed the golden orange and the rich grape of Portugal; dried fruits, sweet cakes, and the various accessories to a dessert in winter-time likewise appeared in crystal dishes. The fire blazed cheerfully in the grate, and, to outward seeming, nought was wanting to complete the happiness of a man who had just been created a peer and who had taken a lovely young wife unto his bosom.

But he whom we so lately spoke of as Mr. Clarendon, and whom we are now to denominate by the haughty title of Lord Holderness, was not happy — no, far from it. He had obtained a wife who was ravishingly beautiful, it was true; but he had lost his daughters, who were more lovely still, and who might have proved his pride and comfort in his old age. The beautiful wife he had not wooed: she had forced herself upon him, and though but a few days had elapsed since they were united, he had already been taught to quail beneath her imperious temper and succumb ignominiously to her despotic will. Nor was Pauline there to soothe him; no, nor his Octavia to comfort him. He felt that he was childless, and the young wife whom he had placed at the head of his household made not his dwelling a happy home.

During the whole of dinner-time, and while the liveried footmen were present, but little conversation had passed

between the noble couple, and those remarks were of a cold and ceremonial nature. It was, however, evident, as the repast drew toward its termination, that Lady Holderness was becoming impatient of the restraint imposed by the presence of the domestics, and that she longed for the moment to arrive when their departure from the room would enable her to give utterance to the thoughts that were uppermost in her mind.

At length the wished-for instant came; and as soon as the dessert was placed upon the table, in the manner already described, Fernanda looked significantly at her husband, observing, " It is now necessary that we should discuss our plans and settle the course which we intend to pursue."

" So soon, ere the honeymoon be past? " ejaculated his lordship, evidently anxious to obtain a reprieve in respect to a subject which he viewed with terror and dismay.

" You have already demanded a postponement of this conference more than once, and I have acceded to your solicitation," said Fernanda. " But five days have now elapsed since we were united to each other, and that period," she observed, her bright scarlet lips curling with a momentary irony, " is quite sufficient for the honeymoon of a pair who wedded under such unusual auspices and for purposes of so purely a worldly nature."

" But, my dear Fernanda," exclaimed Lord Holderness, " the peerage which I coveted, and to which you were to help me, is gained — yes, gained without your assistance; and therefore I think the least you can do is to allow me to enjoy my honours in tranquillity. For you have profited by my good fortune in a manner most unexpected by yourself at the moment when you became my wife."

" If you continue to talk much longer in a style which argues a cowardly, grovelling, indolent disposition," exclaimed Fernanda, her eyes flashing fire and a deep pink hue suddenly rushing to her cheeks, " you will provoke me to upbraid you with no measured invective. But I propose that we argue the point calmly and deliberately."

" What point, my love? " demanded his lordship, in as meek, mild, and conciliatory a tone as he could possibly adopt in order to lull the gathering storm.

" The point whether you are to fulfil the objects for which we joined our hands and fortunes," responded Fernanda,

with a stern emphasis. "You craved a peerage, and I sought vengeance. At that time the removal of Arthur Eaton from this world would have placed you on the threshold of your desires, and would have gratified mine at once. Therefore did we make common cause against that young man, you from motives of ambition, and I from motives of revenge. Well, it is true that accident has suddenly befriended you in a somewhat remarkable manner, for you have acquired your peerage all in a moment — "

"And without perpetrating a crime," added Lord Holderness, emphatically.

"Ah! coward — But no, I will not taunt you yet," exclaimed Fernanda, at first starting from her seat as if to spring upon her husband with the fury of a tiger-cat, then instantaneously subduing her wrath and recovering all her external tranquillity and composure. "Yes, you have obtained your peerage," she continued, with a corresponding placidity of voice; "but I have not as yet succeeded in making the slightest advance toward the gratification of my vengeance."

"And will you not abandon it, Fernanda, dear Fernanda?" inquired the newly created peer, coaxingly.

"Now can I scarcely repress my feelings, so full of disgust and indignation and amazement am I at the question you have dared to put to me," cried the lady, the sea-shell pink on her damask cheeks suddenly deepening into the liveliest crimson, and the violet blue of her eyes darkening to the intensity of the stormiest black. "Renounce my vengeance? Never!" she exclaimed, in a tone of startling fierceness and electrifying wildness. "Although married to you, yet my soul cherishes a deeper hatred than ever toward him. Yes, and it was to enable me to consummate my vengeance against Arthur Eaton all the more easily that I became your wife."

"But how can I aid you in your schemes, Fernanda?" demanded Lord Holderness; "and what inducement have I to assist you, even if I possess the power? You do not suppose that I have any sentiment of vindictiveness to appease?"

"No, but you have ambition to minister unto and avarice to gratify," responded Fernanda, recovering her tranquillity alike of voice and manner.

"Ah! I begin to understand you," murmured Lord Hol-

derness, his wife's observation having touched in his heart the chord which she meant to reach; for if she had allowed five days to elapse ere she compelled him to enter upon the present topic, it was not through any consideration for himself, but merely that she might have leisure to probe every weakness, foible, and failing of his character.

"Listen attentively," resumed Fernanda, "and I shall prove to your satisfaction that the same result which gratifies my vengeance forwards likewise your interest. In a word, you are still deeply concerned in the necessity of removing Arthur Eaton from our path. For although with your peerage you have obtained a pension, yet is the latter so small that it will not serve to support your rank in a becoming manner. Already do I perceive, within the five days of my sojourn in this house, that we are living at the rate of ten thousand a year, instead of two. The carriage you set up the very morning after our marriage, the extra servants you engaged at the same time — "

"Yes, yes, your calculations are accurate, Fernanda," interrupted Lord Holderness. "But why foresee difficulties? "

"Because we must guard against them," promptly ejaculated her ladyship. "Let Arthur Eaton be once removed from your path, and you instantly become heir to the Marchmont estates, that peerage likewise merging in your own."

"Yes, Baron Holderness and Marchmont," said the nobleman, in a musing tone and with a gleam of satisfaction stealing over his countenance.

"Then, may not the possessor of two peerages boldly and confidently ask for an earldom? " cried the temptress, her beauteous features becoming radiant with the triumphant feeling which she assumed as her bright red lips poured the delicious poison into her husband's ears.

"O Fernanda! " exclaimed Lord Holderness; "you have inspired me with thoughts and aspirations which hurry me onward with a force that is irresistible, and you teach me to look upon the hideous aspect of crime as if I had been familiar with it all my life."

"Be brave, be courageous, be bold, my dear Walter," cried the false siren, rising from her seat and throwing her white arms around her husband's neck. "Come, behave in

a manner that will make me love you. When I first revealed my countenance to you the other day, you declared that I was adorable and that you could worship me. Well, give me a proof that you are really gratified by the possession of a young and handsome wife. You see that I am somewhat vain; but then, I know that I am really beautiful."

"And what proof of my affection do you require?" asked the nobleman, snatching a few kisses, and indulging in certain little toyings provoked by the splendidly white neck and remarkably low dress of his young wife.

"I demand," she said, seating herself upon his knee and placing her lips close to his ear, so that her cheek touched his own and her rich glossy tresses swept his shoulder, "I demand that you renounce not one tittle of the grand scheme which made us join our hands and our fortunes a few days ago; and I demand likewise that you place implicit confidence in me, and yield entirely to my guidance in everything which I shall propose respecting Arthur Eaton."

"I promise all you ask, Fernanda," murmured Lord Holderness, bewildered and overcome by mingled feelings of voluptuousness and ambition, and also by the fear of turning this delicious calm into a violent storm.

"You promise that you will not again oppose my views?" she said, inquiringly; "and you pledge yourself likewise to second them?"

"Yes, dear Fernanda," was the reply. "But will you really love me if I become thus docile and obedient toward you? Will you make me happy in this world, if I consent to dare eternal misery in the next?"

"Become all that I wish you to be," answered the lady, emphatically, "and I will adore you. But if you would indeed acquire my love, Walter, if you would have me devote myself fervidly and enthusiastically to you, and you only, you must hesitate at nothing that I may suggest."

"I will prove myself a very tiger of ferocity," murmured Lord Holderness, "if you only continue tender, affectionate, and kind as you are now."

And he strained his beautiful wife to his breast.

"The tenderness, the affection, and the kindness which I am now manifesting toward you," said Fernanda, in a soft, low tone, "are mere coolness and reserve in comparison

with that glowing enthusiasm which I shall testify toward you if you keep your promise and go hand in hand with me upon the path of crime. Yes, crime, my husband, crime," she repeated, the horrible word sounding strange when wafted to the ear by the witching melody of such a voice; " for crime shall cement our love, crime shall consolidate our affections. By plunging into the abyss of crime to the same depth, so that one shall be as deeply stained as the other, by ever keeping side by side in this enterprise of darkness and iniquity, so that one shall be neither before nor behind the other, by establishing, in a word, a perfect equality in our ominous career, we shall reciprocate the same regard, exchange the same amount of attachment, and have our hearts knit together by ties as firm on one side as on the other. And when we have learned to love each other in this manner and upon this system," continued Fernanda, her hideous sophistry flowing all the time in strains the most liquid and charming to the ear, as the pearly stream which the enemy has poisoned glides on into the heart of the besieged city, " then will you find that I am capable of adoring you with an adoration such as woman never bestowed on man before, that I will lavish upon you the tenderest caresses, even as I will surround you by the most delicate and unwearied attentions, and that, whether in the sentiment of love or in the voluptuousness of amorous enjoyment, I will so envelop your mind in blissful fascinations and so instil into your soul a sense of the most ravishing delights, that you shall deem such an amount of bliss cheaply purchased by even the darkest crimes."

" I am thine, wholly thine, Fernanda," murmured the nobleman, drinking in the poison of the honeyed words which his wife breathed in his ears, and now experiencing a species of intoxication from the effects of the warm, impassioned, and amorous looks which she tutored herself to cast upon him. " Wert thou a fiend in human shape," added Lord Holderness, enthusiastically, " I would say yea to everything thou mightest demand, even though it were to involve the surrender of my own soul."

" I see that I shall soon love you far more tenderly than ever I loved Arthur Eaton in the first flush of that glowing passion which was alike my strength and my weakness," said her ladyship, still retaining her seat upon her husband's

knee, and not only submitting to his toying, but likewise bestowing upon him frequent caresses in return.

"What, can you possibly love an old man like me so profoundly as you would have me believe?" asked Lord Holderness, an indistinct and very slight suspicion of his wife's sincerity flashing across his brain.

"Old!" she ejaculated, with an indignation so well assumed that it instantly destroyed his misgiving. "You are only a year or two past fifty, in your prime."

"And you are eighteen, Fernanda," observed the husband, now gazing with a deep but sensuous fondness upon the truly beautiful countenance of his wife.

"Oh, let us not enter upon these comparisons, my dear Walter," she exclaimed, her red lips and her white teeth shining in delicious contrast as her smile beamed radiantly upon the credulous man whom she was thus bending to her will and enthralling in her Circean meshes. "I must now give you a further insight into my own position and likewise into my plans. Know, then, my dear husband, — and you will start in dismay when I reveal the dread truth to your ears, — that I have committed a crime the penalty of which is death, and that there are three people in the world who are acquainted therewith."

"Merciful God! is this possible, Fernanda?" exclaimed her husband, shuddering all over and clasping her with convulsive violence in his arms.

"It is possible, and it is true," returned Lady Holderness. "And now a strange and wondrous mystery is about to be unfolded to you, Walter. For that malady which was silently, noiselessly, and unaccountably carrying Arthur Eaton to the tomb, and from which he has recovered as marvellously and even far more speedily, that malady, I say, was a slow poisoning, and I was the poisoner."

"You!" ejaculated the husband of this terrible woman.

"Yes, I! And now do you abhor me, Walter?" she demanded, in a tone so sweet and plaintive in its half-reproachfulness that it could only be compared to that fragrant zephyr of Orient climes which carries perfume to the sense and pestilence to the heart.

"Abhor you! Oh, no, no," exclaimed the infatuated Lord Holderness. "But continue, Fernanda, continue. We are to become criminal together, and our love is to equal the

crime which is to cement it. Then, continue, I say, and let me see how far you have gone already, so that I may hasten to emulate you. You observed that three persons were acquainted with your guilt in respect to Arthur Eaton?"

"Yes, three persons, all or any one of whom can therefore give up my life to the hangman at any moment," said Fernanda, with a coolness which was remarkable considering the nature of the communication she was making.

"And those three persons?" demanded her husband. "Who are they?"

"In the first place, there is Arthur Eaton himself," replied Fernanda. "Secondly, there is his valet, William Dudley; and thirdly, there is an old midwife named Lindley, who sold me the poison."

"And Arthur is aware that you thus sought his life?" exclaimed Lord Holderness, gazing upon Fernanda with mingled amazement and incredulity.

"He discovered the secret of his malady," she answered, in a tone that convinced her husband she was speaking the truth; "and by the same means that he found out the bane did he arrive at the antidote."

"Then how know you, Fernanda," exclaimed the nobleman, becoming suddenly and seriously alarmed, "how know you that he has not communicated the secret to others? Perhaps his father, Lord Marchmont, or your relatives, the Earl and Countess of Desborough, or Lord Montgomery, your cousin —"

"Tranquillize yourself on that head," interrupted Fernanda. "Not one of all those whom you have mentioned ever dreams of such a thing. Arthur Eaton has kept the secret, religiously and faithfully kept it; nay, more, he has pardoned William Dudley, and, as you are doubtless aware, still retains the man in his service."

"But such generosity as this —" began Lord Holderness.

"Is not sufficient to turn me from my purpose," remarked Fernanda, with an abruptness that overawed her husband in a moment and hushed the remonstrance that was still trembling upon his tongue. "You have now heard a secret which makes you aware of my real position. At the hands of Arthur Eaton I fear little, if anything at all, as matters stand at present; but his valet and the old woman might,

in a moment of inadvertency, or under the influence of a death-bed repentance, compromise me cruelly."

"Yes, I perceive that you are fully and completely in their power, my poor Fernanda," said Lord Holderness. "But what do you propose to do? Where is the remedy? Tell me, my beloved wife," he continued, still toying with her, still receiving her caresses in return, "tell me what you would suggest and how I can help you."

"It is serious, is it not?" observed Fernanda, inquiringly.

"Yes, far too serious not to require immediate attention," answered the infatuated noble. "But what do you propose in respect to that valet and the midwife?"

"To place a seal upon their lips for ever," rejoined her ladyship, solemnly.

"Ah!" ejaculated her husband, with a convulsive start. "And that seal —"

"The silence of death," added Fernanda, in a deep tone, as if her heart were a cavern and the voice came from the profundity thereof.

"Two murders!" said Lord Holderness, straining her convulsively to his breast. "Oh, Fernanda, Fernanda, I shall be blessed by thy love on earth, but through thee shall I be accursed hereafter."

"The present suffices for our thought, because we know that it exists," exclaimed the terrible young woman whom he had thus feelingly apostrophized; "but all that regards the future is vague, dim, uncertain, doubtful. We feel that we exist now, but we are not sure that we shall exist hereafter."

"O Fernanda! let us not add the crime of infidelity to the catalogue of guilt already perpetrated or about to be committed," cried the nobleman, now shuddering more violently than at first. "Ask me to peril my soul, and I will do it; but ask me not to deny that I have a soul thus to endanger."

"I will not again shock your prejudices, my dear husband," said Lady Holderness, with a slight accent of irony in her tone, soft and melting though her voice continued to be. "But you perceive, Walter, you perceive, I repeat, that to ensure my safety William Dudley and Mrs. Lindley must die."

"Yes, they must die," echoed the nobleman, pressing his

quivering lips to those cheeks that were now flushing with a feverish excitement.

"And in the death of one," said Fernanda, with a terrible light flashing in her eyes, "shall my vengeance begin against Arthur Eaton."

"I do not understand you," observed her husband. "That one to whom you allude — "

"Is William Dudley," she replied.

"And how will his death forward your design in respect to Eaton?" asked Lord Holderness.

"You shall see, Walter, you shall see," exclaimed Fernanda, her countenance becoming animated with the glow of a fierce and savage triumph. "We will drink some champagne together, and then, while our blood appears to run like lightning in our veins, I will unfold to you all my schemes, all my projects. And, oh, be assured, Walter, that my vengeance against Arthur Eaton shall be terrible, very terrible."

"When do you propose to take the first step toward the execution of all this?" inquired the nobleman.

"To-morrow, Walter, to-morrow," was the emphatic response.

"To-morrow! So soon?" he cried.

"Yes, to-morrow," rejoined Fernanda. "And now I shall surprise you by stating that the preliminary step is for us to call at Lord Marchmont's mansion in Hanover Square."

"But we know that his lordship is out of town at this moment," exclaimed the newly created peer; "and surely you do not wish to see his son, Arthur Eaton, the object of your bitter hatred and burning vengeance?"

"It is precisely because Lord Marchmont is absent from home," said Fernanda, "and because we shall be received by Arthur Eaton only, in his father's absence, — it is precisely for these reasons, I repeat, that we must call in Hanover Square to-morrow."

"And you intend to court this interview with him whom you regard as your mortal enemy?" exclaimed Lord Holderness, gazing upon his wife in mingled surprise and alarm. "Surely you do not contemplate a sudden and open act of violence against him?"

"Oh, do not imagine that I am so insane, so insensate,"

ejaculated Fernanda. "No, Walter, it is to make my peace with Arthur Eaton, to assure him of my forgiveness, to demand his pardon likewise, and to propose a sincere friendship for the future, — it is for all these purposes that I shall seek an interview with him to-morrow."

"Incomprehensible woman, what do you mean?" cried her husband, now utterly bewildered.

"I mean to render my vengeance the more certain and my own safety the more secure," was the deep-toned, subdued, and significant reply. "But now let us ring for champagne, my dear Walter," she cried, starting from his knees and resuming her seat; "and then, while the blood boils in our veins and excess of rapturous feelings enables us to contemplate crime with indifference, then, my lion-hearted Walter, will I, your tiger-cat, unfold my projects to your ears."

And Lord Holderness rang the bell for the exhilarating juice of Epernay; and then his eyes remained fixed with mingled delight and awe and terror upon that countenance whose ravishing beauty so strangely belied the aspect of the hidden soul, and he felt indeed that he had taken unto his bosom the most dangerous of serpents with the loveliest of skins.

CHAPTER XII

PHILANTHROPY — THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE PLOT

When the Honourable Arthur Eaton manifested so remarkable a forbearance and so unparalleled a generosity toward William Dudley, whom he had detected in the very act of entering his room for a murderous purpose, he received from the penitent valet all the ill-gotten gains acquired by his subserviency to the criminal views of that tigress-woman Fernanda. On the occasion thus alluded to, Mr. Eaton had said to Dudley, " For the present I will take charge of those wages of iniquity; to-morrow I will tell you how they shall be employed. Retire to your own chamber, and fear not that I shall treat you with severity. No, it is my purpose to afford you every opportunity of making your peace with Heaven and becoming a useful member of society."

And what was the project which the philanthropic young gentleman had in view?

The case of his own repentant servant made him reflect upon the fact that many and many a sinner may be rescued from the paths of iniquity and redeemed from utter perdition if, instead of being hunted to desperation as an outcast of society, the genial influence of kind treatment and reformatory measures be adopted. For he felt that had he thrust William Dudley forth into the world, penniless, friendless, and characterless, the man must have perforce continued in the career of turpitude in order to obtain a meal and a bed. But, saved from this deplorable catastrophe, the chances were ninety-nine to one that he would thenceforth shun vice on account of the perils to which it leads, and embrace virtue for its own sake.

These reflections led the Honourable Arthur Eaton to a

more comprehensive consideration of the subject; and it struck him that if some means of reformation and redemption were applied to those unhappy wretches who, under the influence of pinching penury, have committed a first offence, a large proportion might be rescued from total ruin and reclaimed as honest members of society. For he asked himself how it was possible that the miserable youth or the desperate man, when sent adrift from a felons' gaol at the expiration of the term of imprisonment, could strike into the path of rectitude, turn at once to honest toil, and eat the bread of a meritorious industry. No, it was impossible. From the prison-gates do those beings come forth as destitute as when they committed the crime which sent them thither, clothed in rags, friendless, with the brand of Cain upon their brows, and compelled to feel all the anguish, misery, and pinching want inseparable to their outcast state, with the only alternative of thieving again to amend it. For the tyrannical government and the barbarian laws of this oppressed and wretched country have studied only how to punish, persecute, crush, scourge, and trample down, but never to save, reclaim, rescue, and raise up. There are ten thousand enactments by which a poor man may be hanged, transported, or imprisoned, but not one by which he may have the slightest chance of being reformed. So much for the blessings of ignorant aristocratic institutions.

From all this it appeared to Arthur Eaton that an establishment should be founded for the reception and temporary employment of those misdemeanants and felons whom the gaol is daily vomiting back again into that society which discards them as outcasts, an establishment where these friendless wretches might have immediate work given them, in return for which they would receive food and lodging until a sufficient period elapsed to test the sincerity of their penitence and place them in that frame of mind when some humane masters and employers might no longer hesitate to admit them on their land or in their workshops.

Acting upon these philanthropic views, the Honourable Arthur Eaton lost no time in purchasing a considerable piece of ground in the district which is now known as Pentonville, but which consisted of open fields at the period whereof we are writing; and on that tract did he speedily

set bricklayers and carpenters to work to raise a convenient and spacious building for the object which he had in contemplation. The " wages of crime " surrendered up by William Dudley went a considerable way toward the purchase of the land; and the valet was rejoiced when his master unfolded to him the use to which it was to be appropriated.

It was, moreover, resolved by Mr. Eaton that his penitent valet should be the superintendent of the institution when the edifice was completed.

As he did not wish either to obtrude his humane designs upon the public notice, or to incur the annoyance of having his scheme made the topic of endless, varied, and conflicting speculations before its efficacy had even been put to the test, he shrouded the real objects of the building in as much secrecy as possible; but he encouraged the operatives to use the utmost despatch in raising the structure, and thus, in the course of a few weeks, considerable progress had been made.

During that interval, Arthur Eaton had seldom missed a day in visiting the scene of his intended experiment; and very frequently of an evening, when the bricklayers had left off work, would he repair thither with William Dudley, and explain by the light of a lantern the objects of the various architectural arrangements which were thus rapidly developing their features as the several partitions rose within the circuit of the outer walls.

We have now given a rapid sketch of the aims and pursuits that occupied the Honourable Arthur Eaton during the period which had elapsed since that memorable night when he frustrated the murderous purpose that took William Dudley and Fernanda to his bedchamber.

But was Fernanda a stranger to these pursuits? No; far from it. In various disguises had she watched Eaton's movements from time to time; and more than once had she overheard, when concealed in the building, the explanations which he gave to William Dudley. The young gentleman's philanthropy she looked upon as the most sickly sentimentalism; and the valet's deep contrition she regarded as a maudlin sanctimoniousness. Toward the former she continued to entertain the fiercest hatred; toward the latter she had conceived the most profound disgust. She likewise considered Dudley as a traitor to her cause; and thus, while

nourishing schemes of diabolical vengeance against the master, she worked herself up to a pitch of rancorous excitement against the man.

Having placed upon record the preceding observations, we now resume the thread of our narrative, only requesting the reader to bear in mind the discourse which took place between Lord and Lady Holderness, as related in the preceding chapter.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon of the day following the scene just alluded to that the newly created peer and his lovely bride alighted from their carriage at the door of Lord Marchmont's mansion in Hanover Square. We have already intimated that the noble owner of that sumptuous abode was temporarily absent on a visit to his country-seat; and of this fact Lord and Lady Holderness were not only aware, but they had availed themselves of the opportunity to carry out the nefarious and deeply ramified scheme which they now had in hand.

The Honourable Arthur Eaton was in the library when a footman entered to inform him that Lord and Lady Holderness were in the drawing-room. A glow of indescribable pleasure sprang up on the countenance of the young gentleman; for, judging others by his own generous disposition, it instantly struck him that Fernanda, having now married and settled in life, had repented of her former bitter hostility toward him and was desirous of making her peace.

To the drawing-room did he accordingly hasten, and the hope which he had so promptly entertained appeared to receive instantaneous and full confirmation from the air of frank cordiality and graceful affability with which Fernanda proffered him her hand. At the same time she darted upon him a look which seemed to say, " All is forgotten; let all be forgiven."

Eaton did not, of course, entertain the slightest idea that Lord Holderness was aware of the peculiar nature of the intimacy which had once subsisted between Fernanda and himself. He could not possibly suppose that the young lady had revealed to her husband the loss of her chastity previously to her marriage with him; nor did he behold in this union of his relative and his late mistress anything menacing toward himself, much less a league so formidable as that tremendous alliance of interests the most selfish and ven-

geance the most implacable which had in reality taken place.

It was therefore with the ease and respectful courtesy of a polished gentleman that Arthur Eaton congratulated Lady Holderness upon her marriage; and, turning toward her husband, he said, " I now have the pleasure of renewing to your lordship in words those felicitations which I have already conveyed in writing, upon your elevation to the peerage."

" I thank you, my dear Arthur," returned the nobleman, " for the letter which I received from you on the subject. I regret that your father is not at home, that I might have the opportunity of expressing my gratitude toward him for his recent kindness toward me. But in surrendering the pension which he condescended to allow me," continued Lord Holderness, his tone and manner acquiring a certain degree of hauteur, " that pension which he lately augmented so considerably, I am bound to testify in writing the deep sense that I entertain — "

" Surely, my dear Lord Holderness," interrupted Arthur, " this is not the most suitable time to converse upon matters of business."

" It is precisely that I may feel the true independence of sincere friendship," exclaimed the nobleman, " that I am anxious to throw off as much as possible, and likewise as soon as may be convenient, the weight of obligation which presses upon me. This relief will my mind experience so soon as I shall have written a few words to your father. Will you oblige me with writing-materials, Arthur? "

" If your lordship be determined to make this visit one of business as well as of friendship," said the young gentleman, " I cannot resist your purpose any further. I will therefore ring for my writing-desk — "

" Or stay," interrupted Lord Holderness. " I will not give you so much trouble, and, moreover, I would rather be alone for a few minutes while penning the letter. Allow me, therefore, to retire to the library. I know the way — There, do not think of accompanying me any farther."

And, gently pushing Arthur back, as the young gentleman courteously opened the door for him, Lord Holderness hurried from the apartment.

The moment the door closed behind him, the Honourable

Mr. Eaton accosted Fernanda; and in a voice of deep feeling, he said, " I thank you sincerely, thank you from the very bottom of my heart, for having signified by your presence here this afternoon that the past is forgotten and forgiven. The instant that I received intelligence of your marriage the other day, I longed to call, to pay my respects, to offer my congratulations, and to express a hope that henceforth we should be friends. But I was afraid — "

" You fancied that I was too vindictive ever to relent? " observed Fernanda, smiling so sweetly, so benignantly, and with such a bland expression of Christian feeling, that no human being, however intimately acquainted with her character, would have suspected for a moment that this heavenly wreathing of her lips was assumed as easily as she could put on any other appearance of hypocrisy and guile. " But since the past is forgiven," she continued, with a corresponding softness of tone, " let it also be forgotten. And now, Arthur, once more I proffer you my hand, the hand of sincere friendship."

" And once more I take it with gratitude and press it with cordial warmth," said the young gentleman, completely deceived by the words and manner and bearing of that lovely creature who carried the art of duplicity to a degree of such exquisite refinement.

The conversation between Arthur Eaton and Lady Holderness was then continued in a friendly strain, but upon general and indifferent topics, until the young gentleman suddenly observed, " By the bye, I have been grieved to hear that your noble relative, the Countess of Desborough, has suffered a very severe illness."

" She is convalescent now," said Fernanda.

" And the two Misses Clarendon are staying, I believe, at the beautiful little villa belonging to the Duchess of Devonshire, near Aylesbury? " observed Eaton. in an interrogative tone. " At least, so I learned a day or two ago."

" Yes, such is the case," responded Fernanda. " The duchess has taken a great fancy to them."

In this manner was the discourse continued for nearly twenty minutes; but in the meantime, how was Lord Holderness employed?

The reader has seen how artfully he contrived to get away from the presence of Mr. Eaton in the drawing-room, and

thence escape to the library; but he had in view some project of far greater importance than the mere desire to pen a letter to Lord Marchmont. For the sake of appearances, however, he did write an epistle to that nobleman in the sense to which he had alluded, and as soon as he had sealed and addressed it, he stole forth from the library.

No one was in the corridor, and, unobserved, he ascended the staircase. Fernanda had already tutored him so well that he experienced not the slightest difficulty in finding his way to Arthur Eaton's bedchamber, which he boldly entered.

He was prepared for all eventualities. If any one were in that room, his answer was ready: " he had been inspecting certain books in the library, the dust had soiled his hands, and he knew that he might take such a liberty as to seek his friend Mr. Eaton's apartment in order to wash them." Such was the apology which he had at the tip of his tongue, ready to offer in case of need; but the lie was not wanted. He encountered no one, either on his way to the chamber or in the room itself.

And in that room he did not remain a minute. What he did there, we need not at present disclose. Suffice it to say that he succeeded in accomplishing the purpose which he had in view, and, chuckling inwardly, he hastened back to the library. There he remained for a short time, in order to recover a mien of perfect composure; and at length he returned to the drawing-room, where he found his wife and Arthur Eaton conversing as agreeably as if there had never been any misunderstanding between them.

Lord Holderness gave the letter which he had written into the hands of the young gentleman, with a request that it should be presented to Lord Marchmont on the return of that nobleman; and Eaton promised not to neglect the matter, although he again expressed his regret that so much importance should have been attached to it on the occasion of a friendly visit.

The newly created peer and Fernanda then took a most cordial and affectionate leave of the Honourable Mr. Eaton, and, returning to their carriage, they were speedily whirled away to Hyde Park, in which fashionable resort they drove until five o'clock.

At this hour they were borne back to Cavendish Square

to dinner; and when they once more found themselves alone over the dessert, Fernanda lavished the most seductive caresses upon her husband, declaring that he had acquitted himself admirably that afternoon, and assuring him that he was already the object of a love which would speedily expand into the enthusiasm of a boundless worship.

The time passed rapidly away until nine, at which hour Fernanda said, "We must now depart upon the business which we have in hand for to-night."

"I am at your orders, dearest," cried Lord Holderness; and he rang the bell for his hat and cloak, while Fernanda hastened up-stairs to put on a shawl and a black hood such as ladies wore in those times when going out of an evening.

"Has your lordship ordered the carriage?" inquired the footman who answered the bell.

"No," was the response. "Her ladyship and myself are merely going to visit some friends a few doors off, and as the night is perfectly dry and very mild, it is not worth while to have the carriage for so short a distance."

At this moment Lady Holderness returned to the dining-room, wearing an ample shawl and a black silk hood, and, her husband giving her his arm, they sallied forth together.

But instead of repairing to the house of any friends in the neighbourhood, they hastened to the nearest hackney-coach stand; and, entering one of the vehicles, they ordered the driver to take them to the immediate vicinage of the archbishop's palace in Lambeth. Half an hour's ride brought them to the end of their journey, when they alighted, dismissed the coach, and repaired straight to Fore Street.

On reaching the house of Mrs. Lindley, Lady Holderness knocked gently, and the door was immediately opened by the midwife herself. She carried a candle in her hand, and the moment the light beamed on the well-known countenance of the fair patrician, as she partially threw back the hood which she wore, the old woman gave her a respectful welcome. Fernanda then entered the parlour, followed by her husband.

That room was unchanged in its aspect since Fernanda last saw it. The shutters were hermetically closed inside the casements, the white blinds were down, the dark stuff curtains were drawn. The massive walnut-wood furniture was as funereal as ever in its ebon darkness; the pictures,

in their black frames imparted the same unvaried gloom to the chamber. There, too, was the old dame's easy chair with its high back; a good sea-coal fire was blazing in the grate, its lambent flames playing up the wide-mouthed chimney; and, behold! there was another black cat, lazily opening its sparkling, glasslike green eyes, as it lay rolled up on the hearth-rug, yes, another cat to replace the one which Fernanda had poisoned.

The midwife courteously besought her visitors to be seated; then, depositing herself in the easy chair, she put on her great horn spectacles with the large round glasses, and her reptile-like eyes glanced inquiringly toward Lord Holderness.

"I see that you more than half-suspect that this is my husband, dear Mrs. Lindley," said Fernanda, observing the significant look; "and you are right. He is aware that I passed some time in your establishment, and the manner in which I have spoken of you has induced him to become your patron."

"Hush, my dear lady, not so loud!" whispered the midwife, placing her long, thin, parchment-like forefinger to her lip; "the very walls have ears, you know. But I congratulate your ladyship upon your marriage. I saw it mentioned in the newspaper, and I was pleased to think you were so comfortably settled."

"Let us proceed to business, madam, if you please," said Lord Holderness, "for her ladyship and myself have not much time to spare."

"To business, then, my lord," observed the midwife.

"I will explain the matter as concisely as possible," said Fernanda. "His lordship has a niece, a young, charming, and beautiful girl, nobly born, too, who is in a way to become a mother, and whose shame would redound upon a family with a reputation as yet unsullied. This unfortunate young creature, Mrs. Lindley, will be placed under your charge to-morrow night. But she must be introduced hither with the utmost secrecy."

"Yes, yes, I understand," whispered Mrs. Lindley. "You need scarcely give me such precise instructions upon that head. If your ladyship will name the hour at which I may expect my new patient to-morrow night, I shall be prepared to receive her."

"We will say at eleven o'clock punctually," answered Lady Holderness. "And now let me impress upon you that the utmost precaution is to be adopted. Your servants will be all in their own rooms, the lodgers in the house will all have retired to rest, and you alone, Mrs. Lindley, remember, I say, you alone will be sitting up to receive the unhappy young lady whom Lord Holderness will himself escort hither at the appointed hour."

"Everything your ladyship has suggested shall be strictly attended to," said Mrs. Lindley. "I suppose I am to understand that not even my confidential servant is to see the young lady during her sojourn in my house? I am to attend upon her myself?"

"Precisely so," answered Fernanda; "and your recompense shall be most liberal."

"Oh, that assurance is quite unnecessary from your ladyship," said the midwife. "But do you not inquire after your friend, Caroline Walters?" she asked, as Fernanda rose to depart.

"Ah! I had forgotten her," ejaculated Lady Holderness. "Is the poor girl still here?"

"Yes, but she will leave me very shortly, I believe," responded Mrs. Lindley. "Would your ladyship like to see her? She often and often speaks of you."

"Speaks of me!" repeated Fernanda. "How? Does she know who I am?"

"No, no, Heaven forbid!" cried Mrs. Lindley. "But hush! we are both talking too loud, and walls have ears! What I meant was that poor Caroline Walters speaks of the young lady, as she calls you, and she wonders whether you have entirely forgotten her."

"I will come and see her in a few days, when I pay a visit to my husband's unfortunate relative," observed Fernanda. "But in the meantime do not tell Caroline Walters that you have either seen or heard anything of me."

"Your ladyship is well aware that secrecy is the very life and soul of my profession," returned the old midwife, gently repulsing the huge black cat which at the moment leaped into her lap. "But will your ladyship take some refreshment? — or his lordship? A glass of wine and a biscuit — "

"Nothing, I thank you," said the nobleman, drawing his

cloak around him. "To-morrow night, as the clock strikes eleven, shall I be here, with my niece."

"To-morrow night, at eleven punctually," answered Mrs. Lindley.

Lord and Lady Holderness then took their departure.

CHAPTER XIII

CAROLINE WALTERS

Not many minutes had elapsed after Fernanda and her husband had taken their leave of the midwife when a hackney-coach stopped at the door of the sinister-looking establishment, and Mrs. Brace alighted. She was received by Mrs. Lindley on the threshold, and instantly conducted to the warm parlour, where she did not refuse the refreshment which had already been offered to Lord and Lady Holderness.

"I have come to see you this evening, my dear friend," said the handsome and robust milliner, as she sipped her wine, "because I wished to have Caroline Walters disposed of in some manner or another before I bring Rachel Forrester over to you. Rachel must come in a few days, and I do not like the idea of any two of my girls getting together under such circumstances. They are apt to compare notes and then persuade each other that they have been ill-used."

"Precisely so," observed Mrs. Lindley, who was also indulging in some wine, which made her reptile eyes gleam with an ominous light through the large circular glasses. "This Caroline Walters, especially, is a girl of remarkable spirit and strange character."

"She who was so docile at first," cried Mrs. Brace, "and so thankful for everything that was done for her."

"Ah! but in such a place as this," observed Mrs. Lindley, bending forward and speaking with a mysterious air and low whisper, "young women are apt to get ruminating upon their position, and then they fancy that they have been wronged."

"Besides," added Mrs. Brace, "Caroline is half a Spaniard and may therefore be headstrong, vindictive, and unfor-

giving when once her spirit is aroused and her mind is bent upon a particular object. However, we must either coax her into compliance with my views, or else we must use coercion. Perhaps you will have the kindness to summon her?"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Lindley; and she quitted the room.

In a few minutes she returned, accompanied by Caroline Walters.

The young girl — poor creature, she was but sixteen! — seemed pale and care-worn. The natural brunette richness of her complexion had yielded to a certain sallowness which indicated recent bodily suffering as well as a mind ill at ease; and there was a darkness, arising from the same causes, around her fine black eyes. Her raven hair, so luxuriant in quantity and so silky in quality, was thrust negligently behind her ears and fastened in a slovenly knot at the back of her head; and there was no longer in her dress that neatness and precision which had once distinguished her plain though becoming garb. In fact, the aspect of the young girl denoted that the sentiment of personal vanity had been absorbed in deeper and sterner emotions.

She did not hasten toward Mrs. Brace as if she still looked on the milliner as a benefactress; but with a sullen slowness of step and a sinister moodiness of manner she accosted her, saying, "I am glad you have come at last, madam, as I am wearied of being retained a prisoner here."

"A prisoner!" repeated Mrs. Lindley, holding up her hands with well-affected amazement; "what does the dear child mean? Surely the doors have not been barred against her? Surely she has never been locked up in her own room?"

"No," exclaimed Caroline, bitterly; "persecution and tyranny have not gone quite so far. But — "

"Hush, my dear child, hush!" said the midwife; "remember that the very walls have ears — "

"And it may be that they will one day find tongues," returned Caroline Walters, darting a glance of ominous and dire significancy first upon Mrs. Lindley and then upon Mrs. Brace.

"What does the girl mean?" exclaimed the latter. "My dear Caroline," she continued, assuming a tone of conciliation and tenderness, "you are sadly altered toward me.

How have I offended you? What have I done to deserve this coldness, this ingratitude, this contempt?"

"What have you done, madam, to deserve any better feelings on my part?" demanded the young girl, now fixing her large black eyes upon the milliner's countenance as if her fiery looks could pierce that lady through and through. "Oh, madam," continued Miss Walters, in a tone thrillingly wild and bitterly reproachful, "I have learned to view things in a very different light from that in which I formerly beheld them. I now know who it was that literally sold me to the seducer, the base seducer, the nobly born villain who wooed me with guile, won my honour with treachery, and discarded me with a corresponding heartlessness. Yes, madam, I can see through it all, all; and I curse, ay, curse my own folly when I think that there was a time at which I believed that he really loved me. Well, what am I living for, I, who am so thoroughly unhappy, so irremediably miserable? Hope is gone, love is dead, every kind feeling is withered in my bosom; but another flame burns there, in the place of those lost sentiments, — a flame as terrible as if it were a tongue of fire snatched from the raging furnaces of hell."

"Almighty God! talk not in this horrible manner," cried Mrs. Brace, clasping her hands and growing pale with a real and unfeigned terror.

"Hush! I command you to be silent; the walls have ears," exclaimed Mrs. Lindley, gesticulating fiercely at Caroline Walters. "I implore, I beseech you to tranquillize yourself, my dear child," she added, in a more soothing tone. "You said you were a prisoner here, but I hope that you will withdraw that averment. Come, my dear love," she said, more coaxingly still, "do me the justice to admit — "

"I will do myself and you the justice to tell the truth," interrupted the young girl, in a cold, stern, and implacable voice. "That the doors have not been barred against me, I acknowledge; that I might have quitted your dwelling at any moment, Mrs. Lindley, I frankly confess. But though no actual violence has been perpetrated against my liberty, yet am I retained captive by a moral thraldom equally effective and not the less heartless. For the apparel in which I could alone go forth has been hidden, and the little money I possessed has been taken away. Penniless, and without bonnet or cloak, I could not cross the threshold of your

house, and you know it. To all intents and purposes, then, am I a prisoner here; and now I demand my release!"

"It was to consult with you, my dear Carry, upon your future plans and prospects," said Mrs. Brace, "that I came hither this evening. Pray do not excite yourself in this fearful manner. All that has been done was for your good, and the little restraint of which you complain — "

"Well, well, take your own view of the affair, madam," interrupted Caroline, sullenly; "only be quick and order Mrs. Lindley to give me my clothes and my money, and within a very few minutes I shall cease to be a charge to either of you any longer."

"Then you will compel me to speak severely," said the milliner, her cheeks now flushing with indignation. "The fact is, Caroline Walters, that I stand in the light of a parent toward you."

"Yes, a parent indeed!" observed the girl, with a deep, rancorous, malignant bitterness of tone and a ferocious wildness of look. "You prostituted me for gold — "

"Silence!" exclaimed Mrs. Brace, rising from her seat, all quivering with rage.

"Hush! I command, I implore you!" murmured the midwife. "The very walls have ears — "

"Pardon me for speaking too loudly, my good friend," said Mrs. Brace; "but we shall close this interview in a moment. Miss Walters," she continued, turning toward the young girl, "you may vent your spite, your rage, your hatred upon me to your heart's content; but I have a duty to perform toward you, and that duty shall be accomplished. Ungrateful young woman that you are, you now endeavour to lay your own frailty and immodesty at my door; and you dare to impugn my character — "

"Character, forsooth!" exclaimed Caroline, with an irony alike of tone and manner, the keenness whereof made the brazen-faced woman wince visibly. "Oh, who dares speak of character now? Look at your establishment, madam, a nest of refined, elegant, and smooth-spoken prostitutes. Look at yourself, madam, a religious, churchgoing, almsgiving procuress."

"Wretch, I will tear your very eyes out!" screamed Mrs. Brace, her cheeks becoming purple and the veins on her forehead swelling as if they were ready to burst; for the

young girl's taunts, though words in seeming, were daggers in sooth.

"Silence! in the name of God, silence!" said Mrs. Lindley, in a tone of abject entreaty. "You will alarm the house, the neighbourhood —"

"No, no, we will put an end to this scene at once," interrupted Mrs. Brace. "Now, listen attentively, Miss Walters," she continued, assuming an imperious manner as a last effort to overawe the young girl whose conduct both alarmed and surprised her. "Do you know how stands the law with regard to us? I claim you as my apprentice, and I exact from you the obedience which you owe to one who stands in the light of a parent. Refuse me that obedience, and a magistrate will very speedily teach you what are my rights and your duties. Nay, more," added the milliner, becoming bolder as she perceived, or fancied she perceived, that her words were producing the desired effect upon Caroline Walters, "that same magistrate, if appealed to by me, will punish you for your past frailty, and there is no doubt that six weeks at Bridewell would curb your haughty and rebellious spirit into the proper compass. Now do we begin to understand each other?" demanded Mrs. Brace, in a tone of undisguised triumph, as she beheld her victim cowering beneath menaces which appeared feasible enough to an inexperienced mind.

The poor girl, for a moment crushed and overwhelmed as well by fear of the threatened terrors of the law as by the consciousness of her own unfriended, orphan, and lonely position in the world, turned her affrighted looks from the flushed and angry countenance of Mrs. Brace and bent them upon the midwife, as if imploring sympathy even in that quarter. But the old hag, who had resumed her easy chair the instant she saw that the milliner was triumphant, and who now sat in cold, stern dignity, like an abbess of a rigid order, this old hag, we say, fixed on the young girl those reptile-like eyes that now appeared to dilate through their circular glasses, and to gleam with a ghastly and malignant expression which froze the blood in her veins and made her heart feel like ice.

Completely fascinated, as it were, by that undefinable hideousness of attraction, that species of awful mesmeric influence which the old woman exercised at the moment

over the young girl, the latter had no power to withdraw her looks from this dread, unnatural gaze; and when, at the expiration of nearly a minute, the midwife arose slowly from her seat and with her cold, thin, sallow fingers grasped the fair, plump, warm hand of Caroline Walters, the young creature shuddered as if a snake were beginning to envelop her in its folds.

Still was she so spellbound that she gave not utterance to a word; and, under the influence of this tremendous fascination, she suffered the midwife to conduct her away from the room. Lamblike and unresistingly, but swayed by a cold and seemingly mortal terror, Caroline Walters was thus led up-stairs to her own chamber; but when the door was closed upon her and she heard the key grating in the lock, the unnatural spell was suddenly lifted from off her, her senses were unchained in a moment, her blood began to boil and her brain to ferment with all the vitality of a terrible indignation, and, dashing her hand violently against her forehead, she sank upon her knees by the side of her couch, murmuring, " Vengeance! vengeance! "

CHAPTER XIV

THE PRINCE OF WALES AND THE ORPHAN

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon of the day following the incidents just related that Rose Foster was seated in the bedchamber where she was still a prisoner, at Mrs. Brace's house.

The poor girl was pale and care-worn, and her whole aspect showed that she was devoured by an intense grief, alternating only with intervals of blank despair.

Three days had passed since those memorable incidents which saw her at one moment at the mercy of the prince, then delivered by the sudden irruption of Meagles and Melmoth into the room, and then snatched away from their protection to be held a miserable captive once more, and reserved perhaps for that dishonour from which she could not now see a single avenue of escape, unless it were by the appalling path of suicide.

We shall not on this occasion undertake to describe at length the condition of mind to which bitter persecution and agonizing suspense had once more reduced this poor, innocent, harmless orphan girl. Suffice it to say that at the moment when we now again introduce our readers to her presence she was seated in the bedchamber of her captivity, alone with the crushing companionship of her own tremendous affliction.

Suddenly she was startled by hearing the key turn in the lock, and as she sprang from her seat the door opened. A crimson flush came and went upon her whole countenance as rapidly as the shadow of a flitting cloud passes over a field; and then, with cheeks once more colourless, but with a nervous agitation convulsing her from head to foot, she beheld the Prince of Wales enter the room. Not a cry

escaped her lips. She knew that no screaming to which she might give vent, however loud it were, would bring her succour in that accursed house of iniquity; and suddenly as a man is prompted by the instinct of self-defence to raise his arm to ward off the blow that threatens him, so speedily did the resolution spring up in the maiden's mind to make one last effort to escape from this atrocious persecution or perish in the attempt.

" My dearest Miss Foster," said the prince, closing the door, and keeping near it, " once again, for the last time, do I appear in your presence as a suitor. Believe me, oh, believe me, beauteous girl, when I declare that I hate and abhor myself for suffering so much cruelty to be practised toward you; but my love is stronger than my mercy, my passion dominates over my sense of justice. Now be reasonable, angelic girl, and look well at your own position. You cannot escape hence, and I am determined to make you mine. Why not surrender, then, with a good grace? Wherefore not accept the brilliant position which I offer you? Your resistance, sweet Rose, has already been strenuous, sincere, and protracted enough to satisfy the most delicate scruples of your virgin innocence; and now would you be acting wisely and prudently to make a merit of necessity. Oh, be cruel no longer, Rose, surrender at discretion, and do not compel me to have recourse to means which my soul abhors and which I should regret evermore."

The prince paused for a reply, but the young maiden uttered not a syllable. Nevertheless, her flashing eyes and her heaving bosom convinced him that his words had produced an effect upon her, but not that which he hoped and anticipated; for instead of melting into tears and succumbing to the force of circumstances against which she could no longer resist, her appearance showed that her mind was shocked and all her virtuous indignation provoked by the language against which she could not close her ears.

" You do not answer me, sweet girl, and you are angry," said the prince. " Oh, wherefore treat me thus? Why do you regard me as your bitterest enemy — I, who seek to become your best friend? Neither menaces nor entreaties appear to move you, and yet you are a woman, with a woman's heart."

" Oh, at length you compel me to answer you, vile man,"

exclaimed the orphan girl, her cheeks becoming crimson with indignation, and her eyes, usually so mild and benignant in expression, now suddenly flashing fire; "you compel me to answer you, I say, because you dare level your atrocious calumnies against the entire female sex. What, do you suppose that because in the ranks of aristocracy and fashion you have encountered titled ladies whose complaisance toward yourself has only been equalled by their contempt for the poor and humble, do you imagine that because duchesses, marchionesses, and countesses have been proud to win your smiles, even at the price of their virtue, do you fancy, I say, that because you have hitherto found female honour a thing of snow which the sunlight of royalty can melt in a moment, do you believe, on this account, that you have obtained a large experience of the mind and character of the entire sex? No, Prince of Wales, ten thousand times no! There is virtue in English women, there is honour in the hearts of British females. But not in the gilded saloon of fashion, nor in the mansions of the titled, nor in the gorgeous equipages which dash along, with beauty lounging so languishingly inside, no, not there must you look for bright specimens of female virtue. But you must seek them amongst those classes which you and your courtly sycophants despise, the middle and the working classes, I mean, and there only will you find the brows that are worthy to be adorned with the white roses emblematic of purity."

While giving utterance to this indignant defence on behalf of the majority of her sex, the beauty of the young maiden expanded into radiancy. Her forehead seemed to grow higher, and wider, and whiter, her eyes became lustrous in the extreme, her countenance glowed with a rich crimson hue, her bosom swelled and heaved as if the humble mortal were suddenly imbued with the Olympian pride of magnificent Juno, and her attitude gave indescribable dignity and grace to her entire form.

The prince gazed upon her with rapture; he heard the language that flowed from her lips, but marked only the music without heeding the sense, and as she stood before him, her modest loveliness rapidly appearing to expand into the glory of a goddess, his passion was excited to a pitch absolutely maddening. In his veins boiled the frenzied

blood, in his heart raged consuming fires. Had the sacrifice of all his royal prospects been demanded at the moment, or had Satan suddenly appeared to propose a compact involving eternal perdition, the prince would have yielded unhesitatingly, so long as the next moment should have assured him the possession of that lovely creature whose very innocence and resistance had rendered him all the more eager to revel in her charms.

"You talk of white roses, the emblems of purity," he exclaimed, the last words of her sublime remonstrance alone carrying their meaning into a mind that was all in a ferment with maddened desires and licentious longings. "Oh, be thou my blushing rose, tender and soft as thou art in name —"

And, darting toward her, he sought to clasp her in his arms.

But quick as this movement on his part was, more lightly by far did the maiden spring aside, and, rushing past him, she gained the door. In another moment the prince had turned, and his hand was upon her shoulder; but at the same instant she succeeded in opening the door, and, disengaging herself by a desperate effort from the grasp which he fixed upon her, she darted from the room.

Not a word, not a cry escaped her lips; desperation nerved her, and she knew that it was useless to raise an alarm.

Fleet as the fawn, she reached the head of the stairs, down which she was about to precipitate herself, when she beheld Mrs. Brace ascending them. An ejaculation burst from the milliner's tongue, for she instantly perceived, by the flying girl and the pursuing prince, how matters stood.

Springing back, sweeping like lightning past his Royal Highness, whose arms were extended to clutch her, the maiden gained the stairs leading to the top of the house. Three or four steps did she ascend at a time; the angle was turned, the next landing reached. Another flight was already more than half-ascended ere the prince, panting and puffing, had surmounted the former. But Rose runs for her honour, which is dearer to her than life.

The uppermost story is now gained, and the young lady enters the passage whence the attics open. But it forms no part of her plan to seek refuge in either of those rooms. As

well might she have remained in the one whence she has just succeeded in escaping.

A species of ladder, or rough ascent of steps, catches her eye. Joy! joy! her calculation was correct, the hope which she had entertained is fulfilled, the means of flight are there. Up that ladder she climbs, her little feet scarcely touching the steps, so glancingly do they move over them. She raises a trap-door, she enters the loft at the top of the house, — that loft whence she knows there is a means of escape provided, in case of fire.

And now the glance which she flings behind her shows her the prince just at the moment that he reaches the foot of the ladder. She lets the trap-door fall, she stoops and feels for a bolt, the loft being nearly dark; but there is no fastening, and, without wasting another instant, she sweeps her eyes along the interior of the sloping roof. Her glance catches a pensile streak of light gleaming through a crevice; it is a trap-door which opens on to the top of the dwelling.

But it is fastened, and she loses a few moments in drawing back the rusty bolt. At length it yields, and she climbs through that trap-door opening on to the roof, just at the moment that the prince enters the loft from the trap-door at the summit of the ladder.

The maiden pauses on the giddy height, and her looks are averted shudderingly from the yawning depth beneath, for a low parapet running along the top of the house alone stands between her feet and destruction. One moment's giddiness, one false step, and down, down would she fall into the paved yard which separates the back of the house in Pall Mall from the back of that in St. James's Square.

She paused, we say, for an instant as she stepped forth upon the roof, and almost immediately the prince appeared at the trap-door. Then Rose Foster stepped from the sloping roof on to the parapet, at the same instant that the prince sprang forth on the tilings.

"Rose, dearest Rose, in the name of God, come back," he cried, in a tone so changed by dread horror that it seemed like the voice of an old man of eighty.

"No, 'tis for you to go back," exclaimed the intrepid girl, every lineament of her ashy pale countenance expressing desperate resolution; "for if you advance another step,

I take Almighty God to witness that I will plunge headlong into the awful chasm below."

Scarcely were these terrible words uttered, when Mrs. Brace appeared at the trap-door; and an indescribable consternation seized upon her as she beheld the young maiden balancing herself upon the edge of that precipice, like a bird upon a twig of the tallest tree of the forest.

"My God! my God!" murmured the milliner, the dread horror of the first instant now changing into a vertigo which appeared to whirl her around and around

"Rose! Rose! I conjure you to return!" exclaimed the prince, who was likewise a prey to a hideous giddiness, produced by the sight of that charming young girl hovering on the very brink of destruction.

"Dare to touch me now, and I leap into the embrace of death!" cried Rose, her voice swelling into the pæan of a thrilling triumph, for she knew that her honour was now safe, even though its security were to be purchased by the sacrifice of her life.

And having spoken these animated words, she began to tread lightly and rapidly along the parapet, while the prince and Mrs. Brace followed her with their eyes, speechless horror enthralling them, and neither daring to move hand nor foot, so utterly absorbed in the frightful spectacle were they. For it seemed as if the slightest breath or the contact of a feather would cause the maiden to lose her balance and hurl her down into the abyss that yawned below.

On she went, heeding them not, treading cautiously though lightly and rapidly. She might have stepped off the parapet back upon the roof, and thus pursued her way in comparative safety; but then the prince would start from the stupor of consternation and spring forward in pursuit. For the risk which she was daring was the talisman that held him thus spellbound; and therefore in her present appalling peril, in one sense, lay all her chance of safety in another.

Upwards of a minute was thus passed,— tremendous danger to herself and exquisite suspense to the vile prince and the infamous woman who beheld her. On she went, the slightest giddiness or the least tripping, and she would be lost. But no, Providence watched over her thus far; and she gained in safety the attic-window of an adjacent house.

She looked back; the prince was standing, paralyzed with horror, in the spot where she had last seen him; and Mrs. Brace was leaning half-out of the trap-door, in a similar state of mind. Pursuit, then, was not to be dreaded, and, thrusting open the window, Rose Foster entered the chamber to which it belonged.

No one was there, and the maiden passed on into a passage, whence she gained the staircase. This she descended, but not without some degree of alarm lest she should be taken for a thief and summarily treated as one ere she was allowed to offer a word of explanation. Confidence, however, gained upon her as she advanced without experiencing any molestation; and she had actually descended as far as the hall without meeting a soul, when she suddenly encountered an elderly woman, who proved to be a domestic in the service of the family occupying the house.

To this female did Rose, in a few hurried words, state enough to enlist her sympathy; and, with an observation to the effect that "she had for some time believed Mrs. Brace's establishment to be no better than it should be," the good woman hastily supplied the fugitive young girl with an old bonnet and shawl. Further than this her benevolence could not extend; but the gift was of infinite value to Rose at that moment and under such circumstances, and her gratitude was commensurate.

Another moment, and the orphan emerged forth into Pall Mall, the good-natured domestic stationing herself upon the threshold of the door to watch that no molestation was offered from Mrs. Brace's house adjoining.

All was quiet, and the young girl escaped in safety from the neighbourhood where she had suffered so much persecution and had endured such intense anguish.

Penniless, houseless, friendless, Rose Foster sped away. And now the supernal courage which had hitherto sustained her throughout the incidents of her escape underwent a painful reaction, and an overpowering sense of oppression seized upon her. Her brain began to whirl, the ground appeared to tremble and rock beneath her feet, and the powers of memory failed her. She felt as if she were going mad; nor could she steady her ideas sufficiently to resolve in her mind what course she should adopt. Though ignorant of the atrocious treatment which Meagles and Melmoth had

experienced at the hands of the government, she thought not of visiting the abode of either; but she hurried on, on, through the maze of the metropolis, intent only on placing as great a distance as possible between herself and the neighbourhood in which Mrs. Brace dwelt.

The sun went down, darkness fell upon the earth, and still the unfortunate girl wandered on like one demented. At length she gained the open fields, and she was glad. But now memory began to assert its empire and her thoughts gradually grew more settled. A consciousness of her true position came upon her with overwhelming force, and, while sinking with fatigue, she saw that she was houseless, penniless, foodless. Then did she recollect Meagles and Melmoth; and bitterly, bitterly did she blame herself for not repairing at once to either of them so soon as she escaped from the milliner's house.

It began to rain, and she looked through the darkness for some light that should guide her to a place of shelter. A gleam appeared at a short distance on the left, and thitherward she bent her steps. But the light speedily vanished, and on reaching the spot whence it had shone, she found herself close by a large building in process of erection.

Exhausted alike in mind and body, the unhappy girl dragged her weary limbs within the circuit of the walls; and, having discovered a nook which would at least protect her from the rain, she sank down there, enshrouded by total darkness.

CHAPTER XV

A NIGHT OF BLOOD

THE partially erected structure where the orphan had thus accidentally taken refuge was that very establishment which Arthur Eaton had founded; and at this identical moment he was inside the building, accompanied by William Dudley. The light which Rose Foster had seen was caused by the lantern carried by the valet as his master explained to him the purport of the architectural arrangements made since they last visited the premises in this manner; and the sudden disappearance of that light may be accounted for by the circumstance of the young gentleman and his attendant passing farther into the interior of the edifice.

Thus, while the Honourable Arthur Eaton was inspecting the progress of the works, in company with William Dudley, Rose Foster was seeking a shelter from the rain in a nook of that maze of half-finished buildings. Presently a profound sleep fell upon the maiden, for, as we have already observed, she was exhausted alike in mind and body.

But presently a wild cry, the appalling cry of " Murder! " ascended from the midst of the edifice, and Rose started up in horror. For a moment she fancied that she had been dreaming, but this idea was instantaneously dissipated by the loud lamentations which, coming from the interior of the building, smote her ear, and, seized with a mortal terror, the wretched girl fled precipitately.

It chanced that some labourers, returning home from their work, were passing by the place at that moment, and they were alarmed by the rending cry of " Murder," — a cry always dreadful, but doubly hideous when thrilling through the darkness. They stopped to listen, loud lamentations

followed, and by these were they assured that the former cry was neither a delusion on their part nor a mischievous jest on that of others.

Toward the building they accordingly hastened, and in a few moments they encountered some one flying as if on the wings of the wind. Under such suspicious circumstances, and with the cry of " Murder " still sounding in their ears, they laid violent hands on the fugitive. This was Rose Foster, and, with a thrilling scream and a desperate struggle, she endeavoured to tear herself from the grasp of the men, for so confused and bewildered was she by the abrupt manner in which she had been startled from her sleep, and so completely had terror gained possession of her, that in the wild chaos of her ideas it was no wonder if she fancied herself to be falling into the power of emissaries sent out by the prince or Mrs. Brace to capture her. But the resistance thus offered on her part only tended to confirm the suspicions of the labourers; and, despite of her piercing shrieks and her violent struggles, they dragged her into the interior of the buildings. Thence did the bitterest lamentations still emanate, and in about a minute the appearance of a light guided the men, with their screaming captive, to the spot where an appalling spectacle met their view.

Upon the ground lay William Dudley, weltering in his gore and quite dead, while in his breast still appeared the instrument wherewith the fatal blow had been struck by an assassin hand. And bending over the corpse, in a frantic state, was Arthur Eaton, clasping his hands wildly and rending the air with his passionate lamentations.

The lantern stood upon the ground, and lighted this scene of mingled horror and woe.

Roused by the rush of many feet and the dreadful shrieking of the half-maddened Rose Foster, Arthur Eaton turned toward the party; and the instant that he beheld a female dressed in black amidst the men, he sprang forward, exclaiming, " Behold the murderess! "

Then a shriek, louder, longer, more piercing, and more thrilling than all the rest, burst from the lips of Rose Foster, and she fainted in the arms of the men who held her in their grasp.

When she awoke to consciousness, she was in the infirmary of Clerkenwell Prison.

The scene changes to Fore Street, Lambeth.

Three hours had passed since the terrible tragedy enacted in the half-finished buildings at Pentonville, and it was now about a quarter-past eleven on this memorable night.

From a back room on an upper story of Mrs. Lindley's house a young female stole noiselessly forth, bearing a candle in her hand; and descending the stairs in breathless silence, she opened the door of the midwife's parlour.

But to her surprise and alarm, lights were burning within, and the great black cat, springing wildly forth, swept madly past the affrighted girl. Caroline Walters, for she it was, felt herself suddenly seized upon by a vague and unknown terror, and staggering against the door-post, she threw her startled looks around the room.

And, O horror! upon what appalling object did they settle?

Upon the carpet was stretched the old midwife, a ghastly corpse, and bathed in the blood that was still flowing from her neck.

For an instant Caroline Walters stood gazing, spell-bound and transfixed to the spot with dread horror; then, urged by the impulse of an indescribable terror, she turned to fly from the awful scene.

But on the stairs she encountered the two servants of the establishment; and, overcome by her horrified feelings, she gave vent to a loud scream and fainted in their arms.

When she regained her senses, she was in a hackney-coach and in the custody of two constables, who were conveying her to Horsemonger Lane Gaol on a charge of being the murderess of the midwife.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PRINCE'S DREAM

'Twas deep midnight, and his Royal Highness, the heir apparent to the British throne, lay sleeping in his voluptuous couch.

Wax candles were burning upon the toilet table, a lamp stood near the bed, and a fire blazed cheerfully in the grate. Mellow was the lustre thus diffused through the gorgeously furnished apartment. The atmosphere was warm and perfumed, and the heavy drapery of the windows suffered not the slightest breath of the chill air without to penetrate into this chamber where royalty slept.

The prince was lying upon his back; his countenance was flushed, the veins on his forehead were swollen, and his slumber was uneasy. The lamplight played upon his agitated features; and as his lips were parted and his eyelids not quite closed, the gleaming of the clenched teeth and the appearance of a portion of the whites of his eyes gave him a ghastly aspect, as if, although the body were locked in repose, the soul within was awake and enduring the pangs of hell.

Had any one stood by his couch to contemplate him then, the effect would have been hideous and appalling on the mind of the observer; but no eye witnessed his uneasy slumbers, — none save that of God, from whose vigilance no mortal can escape.

The prince was dreaming. It appeared to him that a faint, gauzy mist rose slowly but steadily around his couch, until the entire apartment was filled with a vapour which gradually became more and more dense until it assumed an opaqueness and produced a stifling sensation as if he were enveloped in a thick cloud. Then a wail stole through the midnight air upon his ears, — a wail low, plaintive, and

ineffably mournful, as if the spirit of some departed mother had returned to earth to sing a lullaby over the cradle of the babe whom she had left behind her. With enthralled senses and with an interest painfully acute did the prince feel that his eyes were fixed upon a certain spot beyond all power of withdrawal; and there, in that spot, the cloud grew thicker and more dense, until a female shape appeared in the midst.

And now that shape passed slowly, slowly along before the prince, upon whose forehead a cold dew broke forth; and, with feelings wrought up to horror indescribable, did he recognize in the spectral form the once glorious beauty of one of the many victims of his lust. But as he still gazed with haggard eyes, another shape stood slowly forth from the dark cloud, and then another, and another, and another. And they each and all wore the semblance of lovely girls whom he had wooed and either seduced or ravished in his time, fair creatures who had gone down to the tomb with broken hearts and blighted affections, in shame and infamy.

But although these spectral shapes wore the semblance of those perished victims, yet was their beauty glacial with the colourless hue and the marble inanimation of death, and their forms were wrapped in the long, flowing garments of the grave.

Slowly, like a funereal procession, did the phantoms move around the couch, each circuit that they made rendering them more dreadful to look upon and likewise adding to their number.

And now some appeared to have babes in their arms, — spectral babes, as ghastly as the parents that clasped them to their marble bosoms, babes which were the fruit of those pleasures that the prince had purchased either by means of the most insidious perfidy or the most heartless violence. And those infants had all died either at their births or soon afterward, some sacrificed to the fatal compression adopted by their miserable mothers to conceal their shame, others murdered outright by suffocation, or even by a bloody violence, during the puerperal aberrations of those dishonoured beings who gave them birth.

Around the prince's couch did the grim and ghastly procession go, the shapes alike of mothers and babes gradually losing their natural lineaments and becoming horrible, horrible to gaze upon. And with their stony eyes did they

"ROUND THE PRINCE'S COUCH DID THE GRIM AND
GHASTLY PROCESSION GO"
Original etching by Marcel

ineffably mournful, as if the spirit of some departed mother had returned to earth to sing a lullaby over the cradle of the babe whom she had left behind her. With enthralled senses and with an interest painfully acute did the prince feel that his eyes were fixed upon a certain spot beyond all power of withdrawal, and there, in that spot, the cloud grew thicker and more dense, until a female shape appeared in the midst.

And now that shape passed slowly, slowly along before the prince, upon whose forehead a cold dew broke forth; and, with horror wrought up to horror indescribable, did he recognise in the spectral form the once glorious beauty of one of the many victims of his lust. But as he still gazed with haggard eyes, another shape stood slowly forth from the dark cloud, and then another, and another, and another. And there each and all wore the semblance of lovely girls whom he had wooed and either seduced or ravished in his days of unbridled licentiousness who had gone down to the tomb with broken hearts and blighted affections in shame and infamy.

But although those spectral shapes were the semblance of those ruined victims, yet was their beauty gone, with the colourless hue and the marble immobility of death, and their forms were wrapped in the long, flowing garments of the grave.

Slowly, like a funereal procession, did the phantoms move around the couch, each circuit that they made rendering them more dreadful to look upon and likewise adding to their number.

And now some appeared to have babes in their arms, — spectral babes, as ghastly as the parents that clasped them to their marble bosoms, babes which were the fruit of those pleasures that the prince had purchased either by means of the most infamous gentility or the most heartless villainy. And those infants had all been either born in their mothers' shame or afterward, some sacrificed to the fatal consequences of illicit love by their miserable mothers to conceal their shame, others murdered outright by suffocation, or even by a bloody violence, while the parents had themselves fallen victims to the horrors of

"ROUND THE PRINCE'S COUCH DID THE GRIM AND GHASTLY PROCESSION GO"
Original etching by Marcel

Around the prince's couch did the grim and ghastly procession go, the shapes alike of mothers and babes gradually losing their natural lineaments and becoming horrible, horrible to gaze upon. And with their stony eyes and thin

A.P.MARCEL

glare on the anguished prince, — those eyes which lost their vital colouring and became of a dull, light, leaden blue. Yes, mothers and babes alike glared thus on the prince; babes and mothers reproached him equally with their dead, lustreless orbs.

And though no word was said, yet were these corpselike eyes as eloquent as tongues. For they renewed in the harrowed memory of the prince all the details of his amours with those whose phantoms now reproached him with their stony looks; and he felt that he was a vile seducer in some instances and a cold-blooded ravisher in others. Then he was reminded that he was the father of those babes whose innocent lives had been extinguished almost as soon as the spark had gleamed; and the tremendous truth was held up before him in all its darkest, blackest colours, that he was the man who deserved to be stigmatized as the moral murderer, if not the actual assassin.

And now a wild cry, whose agonizing intonations evinced all the pangs endured by the conscience-stricken man, burst from his lips, a cry that mental torture wrung from him in his sleep, an expression of inward poignancy sent forth from the chaos of a soul whereon the spirit of remorse was moving.

Still he awoke not; despite of the lancinating anguish which rent his entire being, he slumbered on.

And more quickly began to circle the ghastly train of phantoms around his bed, and yet more hideous did they grow. The lamplight seemed to impart a living lustre to the wasted and faded lineaments, making death more appalling and the uprisen tenants of the grave more terrible to gaze upon.

But by degrees they lost the flowing garments that wrapped their forms, and their forms began to lose their flesh and their shapeliness therewith, until at last it was a troop of bleached and gleaming skeletons which now whirled and whirled and whirled around the bed of the princely sleeper.

Mothers and babes, on the skeletons went; babes and mothers, around and around the couch they glided on. With rattling bones the awful pageantry of death swept past and fast; and on the horror-stricken prince did the hideous shapes now seem to glare with eyeless sockets.

Yes, past and fast went the grim array, mothers and babes, babes and mothers, all with rattling bones.

And with the giddy dance of the skeleton throng whirled the brain of the maddened prince; torture and horror, crucifixion and anguish, delirium and despair, all seemed to enwrap him with the pains of hell. He tossed and heaved in his couch as if the voluptuous feather-bed were a huge snake coiled under him and the downy pillows were filled with scorpions. The perspiration poured off him in torrents; the veins of his forehead were swollen as if tensely strung blue cords lay entertwined and knotted just beneath the skin. Oh, the fierce, the wearing, the rending agony of these few minutes during which the gleaming train of skeletons circled about the royal bed.

And now, rapidly as a troop of dancers glide from the stage of a theatre when their part is over, did the hideous phantasmagoria disappear, skeleton after skeleton, and darkness, stupendous darkness, fell upon the scene.

But this darkness was only a portion of the prince's vision; for the wax lights, the lamp, and the fire still burned in the apartment. Therefore was it in his dream that he was entombed in so dense and pitchy a blackness; and while he fancied that his eyes were wide open and looking, as it were, into this deep, unfathomable gloom, vivid lightnings appeared to gleam at short intervals across the palpable darkness.

And then an awful voice, sonorous as if it were the rolling of a huge metal ball on an elastic bridge of brass, and solemn as if it came from a being whose abode was on the other side of the tomb, spoke in the following manner:

" O prince, has the world no warnings for thee, and has hell no terrors, that thou livest in defiance alike of God and man? From him to whom much is given, much is expected; but although earth hath no example of a being on whose head such benefits are heaped as on thine, still hast thou paid not the smallest mite into the treasury of the future. The white page allotted to thee in the book of the recording angel is a blank; whereas thy black page is covered with entries written in the hues of blood. A moral scourge art thou upon the earth; and already are thy crimes so great that if not another misdeed were added, still hast thou done enough to render thy name accursed until the end of time. The present generation, blinded by the dazzling rays of royalty, beholds not all the hideous blackness of thy character; but when, in

the course of a few short years, a more comprehensive liberalism shall have taught the nation to contemplate even its kings without prejudice, thou wilt be regarded as one of the blackest monsters of iniquity that ever disgraced the human species. And then a man will arise, bold enough to tear away the glossy veil which hides the deformities of the mighty by birth and the exalted in rank; and with an iron pen will he delineate all the evil traits of thy character, and mercilessly, though truthfully, depict all the misdeeds of thy life. For how manifold are thy enormities, and how poor the compensation offered by any opposite qualities! Selfish egotist that thou art, if thine eyes fall upon a charming flower blooming in its virgin innocence, 'tis but to blight it with thy lustful looks; if thou beholdest the sunny smiles of maiden artlessness, the hot breath of thine unholy passion comes upon her like a pestilence, and thy kisses leave pollution upon her lips as the snail voids its slime upon the leaf of the rose. Oh, for the hearts which thou hast broken! Oh, for the fervid affections which thou hast crushed for ever! The joy of thy conquests remains impressed upon thy mind while the victim moulders in that deep, silent tomb from whence there is no return. Thou triumphest in pleasures which are purchased by tears, lamentations, and premature deaths. Has some poor widow a lovely daughter whom she cherishes as a pet lamb, the lone woman's comfort must nevertheless be torn away from her to minister to the delights of the Prince of Wales. Has some father an only child, a blooming girl reminding him of the much-loved wife whom he has lost, this fair being, the old man's prop and support, must be snatched from his arms to suit the lascivious fantasies of the Prince of Wales. Oh, that such things should be, and scarcely excite a sentiment of remorse in the breast of him who causeth that widespread misery! But hear me, Prince of Wales, hear me, and tremble. Thou mayst pursue thine atrocious career in this life, thou mayst go through nature's garden plucking the fairest flowers, revelling in their perfume for a moment, and then tossing them aside to wither prematurely, and thou mayst continue to feast thine ears with the lamentations of ruined girls as if 'twere the most delicious music, but, as truly as there is a God above, a God who avenges as well as rewards, a God who is just as well as merciful, so surely shall con-

dign punishment await thee, O prince, in the world to come."

Such was the terrible address which rolled sonorously upon the ears of the heir apparent to the throne, as he lay locked in profound slumber; and then, as the unknown voice died away like departing thunder, a form blacker than the darkness appeared to stand out from the dense cloud surrounding the bed. And the prince fancied that he was gazing steadfastly upon the appalling phenomenon, and that the sable shape expanded into colossal proportions, until it became a mighty giant of hideous mien and terrible aspect.

Then again the voice rolled on the ears of the Prince of Wales, while the portentous phantom stretched out its ebon arm with menacing gesticulation.

"As yet thou hast traced thy path amidst the roses and fairest flowers of the earth," spoke the colossal being, "and thou hast wooed and courted pleasure in every shape. All that is loveliest of female beauty, all that is most luxurious of banqueting and festivity, all that is most sumptuous and splendid, most magnificent and gorgeous, in palaces and equipages, all, all hast thou made thine own. The four corners of the earth have been ransacked to bring together the means and materials for thy enjoyments. Wert thou a deity, thy pomp and thy state could not be exceeded. The millions toil in starvation to maintain thee in luxury; and it would seem as if those millions were created only to serve thee as slaves. Thine egotism has ranged over the whole world to find food for its aliment, and it remains insatiate still. Thy whole life is pleasure, thy whole existence luxury and love. Instead of there being a morrow, and a morrow, and a morrow for thee, each having new duties and bringing with it new cares, it seems as if thine entire existence were a mere continuous dream of soft indolence and voluptuous enjoyment. Such is thy career upon earth: but what will be thy doom hereafter? Oh, hideous and appalling contrast, a contrast beyond the conjecture of even the wildest and most horrified imagining. But thou hast feasted almost to satiety upon earthly pleasures, thou hast bathed to the very hair of thine head in the world's fount of bliss. Now, then, behold the doom which awaits thee after death."

Thus speaking, the colossal phantom encircled the prince with his huge sable arm, and his Royal Highness shrieked

piercingly in the midst of his slumber, for it seemed as if the cold and slimy contact of a tremendous snake were coming upon him. And he writhed and struggled with horrible convulsions in the imaginary grasp of the sable being; and then it appeared as if he were suddenly torn away from his couch and carried with appalling rapidity through an atmosphere as black as pitch and as dense as if it were one vast mass of soot. The numbness of an awful consternation now fell upon him; his tongue was paralyzed, so that he could not give vent to the scream which he wished to send forth as the expression of his agony, and through the black, palpable mist was he borne along, with hurricane speed, in the arms of the colossal phantom whose touch was like that of the slimy snake.

On, on through the stupendous soot-mist did the terrible being bear the prince, whose mind was filled with such dire horror that no mortal pen can find words to depict it, no human language afford terms to delineate its intensity. And by degrees the conviction dawned in unto the soul of this prince that he was in the embrace of another prince, more powerful than himself, the prince of the realms of darkness. At the same time that this reflection was working its way into his mind, he became aware that the shape of the colossal being was growing every instant more and more terrible; for although the headlong journey was continued through the black darkness which was felt with the same sensation as if the prince were being dragged through a pool of muddy water, yet was he enabled to trace all the outlines of the hideous being that held him in its infernal grasp. And he saw that instead of possessing legs and feet, the lower portion of the demon's body elongated in the form of a tremendous serpent, the vast mass of moving, loathsome, undulating blackness stretching away, away, to an incalculable distance, and at length being lost in the sootlike gloom. And as the fiend went rushing on with the speed of the hurricane, thousands of miles a minute, that monstrous tail rolled after him in a huge sable volume, as if the darkest thunder-cloud had gathered to form his train.

As the traveller through a night of pitchy obscurity catches a glimpse of lights glimmering in the distance, and beholds them increasing in brightness and in number as he draws nearer and nearer, until he distinguishes a vast city splen-

didly illuminated to celebrate some grand festive occasion, so did the Prince of Wales now begin to catch glimpses of far-off fires, which gradually developed their vastness and their lurid brilliancy to his view as the demon hurried him on toward that appalling destination. At length it appeared to the gaze of the horrified prince that he was approaching an illimitable tract of country all flooded with liquid flames, as the fields of the earth are inundated with water. Pestilential odours filled his nostrils with a sulphurous smell, and his throat grew parched, as if he had been swallowing ashes. A sense of consuming heat came rapidly upon him at the same time and he knew that he was being borne headlong on toward the endless burning lake of hell.

But suddenly the demon stopped short, and his sable arms placed the prince upon the summit of a pillar shooting up from some unfathomable depth below, a black marble pillar, on which his Royal Highness was left by the fiend to balance himself as well as he might, with the intuitive conviction that if he fell it would be to encounter destruction.

" Behold my kingdom! " exclaimed the prince of darkness, addressing the prince of the earth in that sonorous voice which now seemed to roll in undulating waves of sound throughout all space. " Upon the earth, immense is the line of demarcation which selfishness, egotism, and usurpation have traced between the high-born and the humble, the pampered few and the toiling many. But in my kingdom all are equal, and those distinctions disappear. In yon fiery lake, kings are suffering by the side of beggars, popes and bishops are writhing in the same pit with thieves and vagabonds. But if there be places in my realms where tortures are more exquisitely keen than elsewhere, if there be spots where the fire burns more intensely and serpents bite more sharply than in others, then do I reserve those scenes of excelling anguish for the souls of men who have occupied the highest places upon the earth. And now behold the wonders and the horrors of my kingdom."

With these words, the fiend waved his mighty arm, the sweeping effect of which was as if a strong wind suddenly agitated the sooty darkness that filled the air above the lake of fire; and it seemed to the prince as if he tottered and shook upon the summit of the colossal pinnacle where he

stood. But, recovering his balance just at the moment when he was about to give vent to a piercing shriek in the terror of falling, his Royal Highness suddenly beheld a strange and fearful spectacle.

For the lake of fire had risen in a moment so high up that it appeared as if he suddenly beheld, by the aid of a microscope, a scene which was far distant and confused before. And that flood of flaming lava was now swarming with life, as a drop of muddy water abounds in hideous things when inspected by the magnifying power of the instrument just mentioned.

Yes, there, in that vast range of fire which stretched illimitably northward and southward, eastward and westward, there, in the erubescent flood of living, liquid flames which glowed with a withering, stifling heat, there, in that boundless morass of ever burning levin, writhed the millions that people Satan's kingdom. Attired as they were when upon the earth, and retaining all their mortal lineaments, those immortal spirits of the damned tossed, heaved, and struggled with hideous convulsions amidst the tortures that enveloped them. But, oh, with what an awful shudder and with what a direful sickness at the heart did the Prince of Wales observe that amongst the doomed myriads were thousands and thousands wearing crowns, or mitres, or coronets, the emblems of their rank on earth. Yes, and how vast was the proportion of those whose forms were decked in rich garments, and who had gold chains suspended to their necks and glistening rings upon their fingers, the evidences of the luxury in which they had revelled during their lives. And then, indeed, did the horrified prince behold the fulfilment of the divine saying, that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

Suddenly, while he was yet gazing upon the tremendous scene which stretched around and far away, that ocean of living fire which had no limit and which was bounded by no shore, the demon grasped him again with his sable hand, which was fashioned like the claw of a vulture; and, holding him forth at arm's length over the candescent flood which glowed and roared below, he exclaimed, in a loud voice, "Now shalt thou receive the reward due to thy crimes. Octavia Clarendon and all thine other victims shall be

avenged. Down, down into the depths of hell, and writhe there henceforth in everlasting torments."

As these last words rolled away from the demon's lips, sounding like awful thunderings throughout the realms of space, he relinquished his hold upon the prince, who instantaneously fell screaming and shrieking horribly through the jet-black air.

But just as it appeared to the wretched George that he was about to plunge headlong into the fiery lake, he awoke with so convulsive a start that the massive bedstead shook and quivered beneath him.

Then he lay motionless, utterly motionless, for a few minutes, striving to collect his scattered thoughts and settle his scared ideas in such a manner as to deduce from them the conviction that it was really all a dream.

But such a dream, — oh, the death-bed has known no anguish and the churchyard has seen no mental misery more poignant than the hell of excruciating feelings through which the Prince of Wales had passed in that tremendous vision. Still upon his corrugated brows stood the big drops of terror, still upon his countenance lingered the lines into which its hideous workings had convulsed it, and still was the sense of an awful consternation upon his brain and in his heart.

At length, when assured that there was nothing of reality in all that he had gone through, he raised himself in the bed, poured a quantity of brandy into a tumbler, and drank the burning alcohol at a draught. Then, closing his eyes, he endeavoured to settle himself to sleep again; and slumber was just weighing down his lids when a strange noise at the farther end of the spacious apartment fell upon his ears.

CHAPTER XVII

A STRANGE ADVENTURE

WITHOUT shifting his position in the bed, for he was so far overcome with drowsiness as to be unwilling to make any exertion, the Prince of Wales opened his eyes; but he was instantaneously recalled to complete consciousness, when he beheld the door of the secret staircase open slowly and cautiously. The idea that thieves had dared to break into Carlton House naturally flashed to his mind, and he thrust his hand toward the silken bell-cord which hung behind the curtains, when, to his amazement, he recognized the well-known form of the Amazon as she noiselessly glided into the room.

The first suspicion now yielded to the thought that Lady Lade, presuming upon the intimacy of a former occasion when she had disported with his Royal Highness in the bath, was intent upon some frolic; and, all idea of danger being instantaneously dissipated, the prince raised himself in his couch and surveyed the beauteous intruder with mingled feelings of curiosity and indignation.

Closing the door as gently as she had opened it, the Amazon, who was dressed in her male attire, approached the couch; and when she saw that the prince was awake and gazing upon her, she took off her hat, smoothed down her glossy hair, and bent upon him a smiling look fraught with a wanton sweetness that immediately disarmed him of his anger.

"Pardon me, your Royal Highness," she said, advancing close up to the bed, "pardon me for this unwarrantable liberty, this extraordinary intrusion, and deign to hear me while I give a brief explanation of my motive."

"Beauteous lady," exclaimed the prince, now feeling assured that the Amazon suspected not his treachery to-

ward Tim Meagles, although he was curious to learn what effect that individual's sudden disappearance had produced upon her, as well as the conjecture which she might have formed relative to the cause of it, " beauteous lady, if you come to me as the representative of the goddess of love and pleasure, you are truly welcome; for not only am I passionately enamoured of your charms, but I am likewise far from displeased at the sudden and unexpected presence of such agreeable company, inasmuch as I have only just awoke from a dream which troubled me not a little."

" My dear prince," said the Amazon, seating herself on the edge of the bed, and fixing upon him a look full of voluptuous languor, " I came but to consult you as a friend and concerning a friend. If, however, you wish to receive me in another and more tender capacity, I am your Royal Highness's obedient servant now, as I was a few weeks ago in yonder bathroom."

" You are looking gloriously handsome to-night, Letitia," said the prince; " and were I an anchorite — which, thank Heaven, I am not — you would assuredly tempt me to sin."

" But do permit me to give you some little explanation of this most extraordinary intrusion," exclaimed the Amazon, disengaging herself from the embrace in which the prince had caught her, though not without having permitted him to cull a few kisses from her moist red lips. " The fact is," she continued, reseating herself upon the bed, but a little farther off than before, " some days have elapsed since our mutual friend Meagles disappeared most strangely and unaccountably from his lodgings."

" Well, I have missed him too," ejaculated the prince, colouring deeply as he spoke; but as the Amazon was looking downward at the moment, he flattered himself that his confusion passed unperceived.

" At first," continued Lady Letitia, " I was not at all uneasy, because there might be a thousand reasons for his temporary absence from home. But when a couple of days passed and no tidings were received from him, I began to fancy that he must be in prison — arrested for debt, perhaps — and unwilling to let his friends know of his tribulation. I accordingly visited the Bench and the Fleet, and then made the round of every sponging-house in London — "

"With what result?" demanded the prince, as if sharing the Amazon's anxiety on behalf of the missing individual.

"With no success whatsoever," replied the lady; "and ever since I have been racking my brain to think what possibly can have become of him. At length — but not until to-night — it struck me that your Royal Highness had probably despatched him upon some secret and important mission; and knowing that he possessed a pass-key to the secret staircase of this apartment, I hastened to his lodgings, possessed myself of it, and made bold to pay the present visit. For when once a particular idea is in my head, I cannot rest until I have acted upon it; and my suspense was too great to permit me to curb it until the morning. Besides, I thought it probable that your Royal Highness might not have yet retired to rest, in which case I hoped and trusted to be pardoned for this intrusion."

"You are pardoned, my dear Letitia," said the prince. "Your forgiveness was sealed by those kisses which you allowed me to snatch just now, and which," he added, stretching his arms forward and again seizing her around the waist, "I mean to renew."

Thus speaking, the impassioned prince glued his lips to hers and whisperingly spoke honeyed words in her ear.

"But it was not for this tender dalliance that I came," she responded, in a low and melting tone, as she once more disengaged herself gently from his arms. "It was to obtain intelligence, if possible, concerning my absent friend — "

"And you have understood by what I have already said, my dearest Letitia," answered the prince, "that I am as ignorant and uneasy relative to Meagles as you are yourself."

"Yes, I feared as much by the observation you made just now," said the Amazon.

"Oh, let us hope that it is only some frolic on our friend's part," exclaimed the prince, "and that he will shortly reappear. Perhaps, my bewitching huntress, he is at this moment proving unfaithful to you — "

"Well, even that idea would be a consolation," interrupted the Amazon, appearing to take the suggestion quite seriously. "But if it should prove as your Royal Highness imagines, I can promise Master Meagles that he will be rated soundly by me. Here I have been undergoing all the imaginable and unimaginable tortures of the cruellest suspense — "

"Oh, let me kiss those lips which you pout so prettily," exclaimed the heir apparent, snatching her to his arms a third time. "And now, my charming huntress, let me implore you to lay aside this moping mood and converse gaily with me."

"It is impossible to resist you," said the Amazon, and all in a moment her countenance became radiant, as it was wont to be. "You say that you have had an evil dream?"

"Yes, and I am dull, in low spirits, altogether queer, Letitia. And thus I am really glad you have come to chat with me awhile."

"And I also, since such is the state of the case," responded the Amazon. "But this dream of yours — Ah! you start. Well, if the subject be an unpleasant one, I will not again allude to it."

"Excellent Letitia!" murmured the prince, pillowing his head upon her shoulder.

"There, close your eyes and sleep thus," said the Amazon; and with the hand of the arm that was thrown around his neck she pressed down his eyelids as if in a half-playful, half-soothing humour.

At the same instant, with the other hand, the Amazon took a small phial from the pocket of her breeches and poured a few drops of its dark-coloured contents into the tumbler whence the prince had already drunk the brandy, as just now stated.

"Ah, it is sweet to repose thus," murmured the prince.

"Sleep then," replied the Amazon. "But — Ah! now you are all wide awake again! — and these kisses — "

"Oh, you are so handsome, dearest Letitia."

"You say so. But — "

"But it is true," and he clasped her in his arms.

An hour afterward Lady Letitia Lade was standing by the magnificent bed.

Glancing toward the prince, who was sleeping a profound lethargic slumber, she murmured to herself, "The cold-blooded villain! Oh, that I was compelled to play the hypocrite with him! But he imbibed the narcotic in the large dram of brandy which I gave him, and he will not awake for hours to come."

Then a smile of triumph played on the moist coral lips

of the Amazon, and she drew from beneath the prince's pillow the golden chain to which was suspended the key of curious workmanship. Therewith opening the desk of his Royal Highness, she proceeded to ransack its contents, and in the course of a few minutes she found the papers for which she was searching.

" 'Tis as I thought," she said to herself, again speaking low and murmuringly with her liquid, musical voice. " The traitor, the false friend! But you shall be avenged, Meagles; you shall be avenged, even if I do not succeed in procuring your restoration to this country."

Then, locking the desk and replacing the chain with the key underneath the pillow of the prince, Lady Lade secured the papers about her person and took her departure as noiselessly as possible by the secret staircase.

When his Royal Highness awoke at a late hour in the morning, the first conviction that broke upon his mind was that he had a most distressing headache, and then the incidents of the night began to present themselves in due order to his memory. He recollected the hideous dream which had made him endure such exquisite tortures, and those painful reminiscences were followed by that of the visit of Lady Lade.

Yes, she had been with him, — but for how long? He knew not. The last incident that dwelt in his mind was a laughing proposal which she made him that each should drink a dram of brandy, and he recollected that he had as good-humouredly assented to the proposition and taken his share first, she herself pouring it out and handing it to him. Then he must have fallen into a deep sleep, for he remembered nothing more.

But she was gone, the beautiful huntress had disappeared; and a vague suspicion of something wrong slowly sprang up in the mind of the prince. Her mysterious visit, that conversation about Meagles, the dead sleep which had fallen upon him the moment after he had drunk the brandy, the departure of the lady before he awoke, the unpleasant sensations which he now experienced, and which struck him as being the result of a powerful narcotic, all these circumstances appeared to link themselves together and form a chain of evidence to support the misgivings which he felt.

CHAPTER XVIII

EVIL TIDINGS

WHILE the prince was thus yielding to his gloomy reflections, Germain, the French valet, stole gently into the apartment and advanced on tiptoe toward the couch to ascertain whether his master was awake. Then, perceiving that the royal eyes were wide open, the dependent bowed and stood in an attitude which showed that he was desirous of being permitted to speak.

"Well, what is it, Germain?" demanded the prince, impatiently, for he was very far from being in the best possible humour.

"May it please your Royal Highness," said the valet, "Mrs. Brace solicits an immediate interview on the most important business. She wishes to know whether your Royal Highness will deign to visit her, or whether it is the royal command that she shall wait upon your Royal Highness."

"Then the business is decidedly urgent, eh?" exclaimed the prince. "Well, let Mrs. Brace come to me by the secret staircase as soon as possible; and in the meantime I shall get up."

Germain bowed and retired; but, having despatched the message to the milliner, he hastened back to the royal apartment to assist at the toilet of his master. The prince, however, only dressed himself in a loose *déshabillé;* and by the time this was done, Mrs. Brace made her appearance. Germain then retired, and the heir apparent was left alone with the milliner.

"Oh, what a terrible calamity has occurred!" exclaimed Mrs. Brace, at once giving vent to the expression of that profound trouble which agitated her.

" What, in the name of God, is the matter? " demanded his Royal Highness, becoming seriously alarmed.

" Rose Foster, the unhappy girl — " ejaculated the milliner.

" Well, well, what of her? " cried the heir apparent.

" She is in prison, your Royal Highness — "

" In prison! " repeated the prince, starting from his chair as if he were suddenly galvanized.

" Yes, in prison, on a charge of murder," added the milliner, quivering from head to foot and her luxuriant bosom heaving and sinking rapidly with the deep emotion which agitated within.

" Is it possible, or am I dreaming? " exclaimed the prince, pressing his hand to his brow. " The beauteous name of Rose associated with the horrible word murder! Oh, no, no, it cannot be! "

" And yet it is as true as that I am here to tell you the sad tale, or that you are there to hear it," said Mrs. Brace, in a tone that left no possible room for any further doubt upon the subject.

" But she is utterly incapable of such a crime," ejaculated his Royal Highness, still cruelly bewildered.

" Of that I am well aware," rejoined the milliner. " Nevertheless, a crushing amount of circumstantial evidence weighs against her, and it is impossible at present to say whether the matter will take a turn when the examination comes on at noon this day. At all events, it is probable that the girl may be led into revelations but too well calculated to compromise your Royal Highness and myself."

" And yet Rose possesses a generous disposition," exclaimed the prince.

" But she will scarcely scruple to tell the truth — all the truth," returned the milliner, emphatically, " to account for her becoming a houseless wanderer last night when the deed was committed — "

" Tell me the circumstances of the case," interrupted the prince. " At present I am thoroughly in the dark concerning it. Who has been murdered, where was the crime committed, and how happened it that the accusation should be made against this poor girl? "

" All I know upon the subject is this," answered Mrs. Brace: " that about an hour ago the matron of the infirmary

of Clerkenwell Prison called upon me to state that a young person had been taken thither last night on a charge of murdering a certain William Dudley, the valet of the Honourable Mr. Eaton, who is the only son of Lord Marchmont. It appears that the crime took place in some unfinished buildings in the north of London; and Rose was captured while flying from the spot."

"But it is impossible that she could have been guilty," exclaimed the prince.

"I have already told your Royal Highness I do not believe that she is," answered Mrs. Brace. "To return, however, to what I was saying, the matron of the infirmary informed me that the young prisoner had given her name as Rose Foster, and had stated that she had been for some weeks in the employment of myself, but that she had quitted me suddenly for reasons which she should explain if necessary. The matron accordingly visited me to ascertain if those statements were correct. I not only assured her that they were, but likewise expressed my firm conviction of the innocence of the girl, to whom I sent a very kind message by the matron. And now your Royal Highness will please to tell me what is to be done in this most distressing case, for if Rose should explain to the magistrate the causes which drove her forth from my house, I am totally undone."

"What, in the name of Heaven, do you advise?" demanded the prince, becoming more and more agitated every instant. "For my part, I feel as if I were looking through a fog."

"But in the midst of it there is a pit yawning to swallow us both up," observed Mrs. Brace, in a tone so profoundly solemn that it caused the prince to tremble with a cold shudder from head to foot.

At this moment there was a knock at the door, and his Royal Highness exclaimed, with petulant impatience, "Come in."

Germain entered, bowed, and said, "May it please your Royal Highness, a person wishes to see Mrs. Brace immediately upon very particular business."

"Who is it?" demanded the prince.

"A young lady who gives the name of Forrester," was the response.

"Ah! one of my own girls," ejaculated the milliner.

"You had better see what she wants and then come back to me," said the prince.

Mrs. Brace accordingly retired; and the heir apparent began to pace to and fro in an agitated manner, for the terrible intelligence he had this morning received troubled him sorely and quite threw into the background of his memory the incidents of the past night.

In a few minutes the milliner returned, or rather, staggered back into the royal apartment, her eyes wild and haggard, her countenance deadly pale, and her entire form trembling convulsively.

"What, in the name of God, is the matter?" demanded the prince, rushing forward and catching her in his arms.

"Great Heaven! what misfortunes, what calamities!" murmured the wretched Mrs. Brace, in broken sentences, as she sank back in the chair to which the prince bore her.

"Speak, I conjure you to speak, my dear Fanny," exclaimed his Royal Highness. "What is the matter? What new misadventure has occurred?"

"Another murder, another horrible murder, and one of my girls in custody upon the charge!" returned Mrs. Brace, gasping forth the words with difficulty. "Oh, ruin is coming upon me! I see it, plain and palpable —"

"Cease, cease these lamentations," cried the prince, speaking with feverish impatience as he recovered from the shock which the milliner's terrible revelation had caused him to experience. "Surely your brain must be wandering, your ideas are unsettled, you are labouring under a delusion."

"Would to God that I were!" exclaimed Mrs. Brace, pressing her hands to her throbbing brows and shuddering visibly. "Rose Foster at Clerkenwell Gaol, Caroline Walters in Horsemonger Lane Prison, each accused of a diabolical murder, each able to make revelations that will bring down ruin, utter ruin, upon my head — O God! it is more than I can bear!"

And the wretched woman burst into an agonized fit of weeping.

This efflux of tears consoled her somewhat, or, at all events, relieved her, and in a few minutes she wiped her eyes, saying, "Misfortunes never come alone, and these are black and threatening indeed."

"But the second calamity — what is it?" demanded the prince.

"The midwife in Fore Street, the woman whom I have often named to you, was murdered last night," said Mrs. Brace; "and one of my girls, a certain Caroline Walters, has been taken into custody on suspicion of having perpetrated the deed."

"And is that suspicion well founded, think you?" inquired his Royal Highness.

"Alas! yes," was the mournful response. "Caroline Walters is as capable of the crime imputed to her as Rose Foster is incapable of the deed with which she is charged."

"And from what channel have you learned this new misfortune?" asked the Prince. "Who sent Miss Forrester to you?"

"A Bow Street officer has just been to my house," returned Mrs. Brace. "Indeed, he is waiting there now, in case I should like to see him. For although the murder of the midwife was committed in Lambeth, the magistrates of which district will examine the wretched girl presently, yet this Bow Street officer has been engaged to institute the usual inquiries concerning the accused; and he is now employed in both cases. What shall I do? Would you advise me to see him?"

"I have a very great mind to see him myself," observed the prince. "These Bow Street runners are men who will do anything for money. They can collect evidence to suit just which side they please, to make black seem white or white black."

"Oh, if you think, my dear prince, if you have a hope, to save Rose Foster, yes, and Caroline Walters likewise," gasped Mrs. Brace, throwing herself at the feet of his Royal Highness and seizing both his hands with nervous violence in her own, "I implore, I beseech that you will see this man —"

"Yes, I will see him," ejaculated the heir apparent, forcing the milliner to rise. "But would you seek to save that Caroline Walters, whom you believe guilty, as well as our poor Rose Foster, whom we feel to be innocent?"

"We must save them both, prince," answered Mrs. Brace. "The revelations which Caroline Walters could make concerning me —"

"Enough," ejaculated his Royal Highness, who appeared to have made up his mind to play a resolute and determined part. "Go and bring the Bow Street officer hither by the private staircase."

"In five minutes he shall be here," answered Mrs. Brace, her countenance lighting up with hope.

She then hurried away, and the prince resumed his walk up and down the room; but this pacing to and fro was less troubled than before, inasmuch as he persuaded himself that the Bow Street officer would be enabled to avert the peculiar evils which now wore so menacing an aspect.

In a short time the door of the private staircase was opened again, and Mrs. Brace reappeared, followed by a tall, stout, middle-aged man, shabbily dressed, and carrying a huge stick in his hand. On being thus introduced into the presence of the prince, the officer made a bow which, though very low, was as awkward and ungainly as if it were an elephant practising an obeisance. Then advancing toward his Royal Highness in obedience to a hastily whispered intimation from the lips of Mrs. Brace, he made another bow and waited to be spoken to.

"What is your name, my good fellow?" inquired the prince, adopting a very conciliatory tone.

"Peter Grumley, may it please your Royal Highness," answered the official, in a voice which was as rough and hoarse as if he were speaking through a cracked bassoon, for the truth was that he had been singing the best part of the night at a free-and-easy.

"Well, Mr. Peter Grumley, we shall know each other better presently," said the heir apparent. "I believe you are an officer at Bow Street."

"The head officer, at your Royal Highness's service," was the response, accompanied by another elephantine bow. "In fact, this here lady," he continued, jerking his thumb over his shoulder toward Mrs. Brace, "has told me as how that your Royal Highness has a mind to put a summut in my way, and I should be proud to do anythink to please your Royal Highness, let alone the recompense attending it."

"And I may depend upon your caution and secrecy respecting my interference in the business that I wish to consult you upon?" said the heir apparent.

"I'd sooner slit my windpipe than blab a syllable," exclaimed Mr. Peter Grumley, with more emphasis than elegance. "Besides, it's my dooty to obey your Royal Highness, which will some day be the suverin of these rel-ems."

And the embryo "sovereign of the realms" could not help smiling at the pronunciation of the Bow Street officer, who, thinking that he was bound to take the cue of good manners from the prince, gave a tremendous grin, as if his head were suddenly opening from ear to ear.

"But let us hasten to business," cried the heir apparent, "for time is precious."

Mr. Grumley's mouth instantly closed, and he became all attention.

"I believe you are engaged in sifting the particulars of the two dreadful murders which were committed last night?" said the prince, interrogatively.

"Such is my wocation, may it please your Royal Highness," answered Grumley.

"And what is your opinion of each case?" demanded the prince.

"Well, about the one what took place in the buildings up by Barnsbury Park," rejoined the officer, "I think there's some mystery as will make matters turn up different from what they now appears; for it don't seem natral that a delicate young gal of sixteen should murder a middle-aged walley with whom she doesn't appear to have had any connection whatsomever. As for t'other case, the one over in Lambeth, I sent my man Mobbs — Please your Royal Highness," continued Grumley, interrupting himself, "Mobbs is my leftenant, as the saying is, my head muck and factotum; he's a cunning blade, is Mobbs — 'tis the same wot pitched his wife out of a three-pair back and cut his child's head off some five or six year ago. May be your Royal Highness recollects the circumstance?"

"I cannot exactly say that I do," responded the prince, with a visible shudder; but he spoke mildly, inasmuch as it was his policy just at this moment to conciliate Mr. Grumley's good opinion as much as possible. "But you were about to give me some information respecting the dreadful affair in Fore Street."

"Yes, so I were," observed the official. "Well, I was

on the pint of telling your Royal Highness that I sent my friend Mobbs over to look arter that little business there, and he's quite convinced, from all he saw and heard, that the gal Caroline Walters must have butchered the old 'ooman. So in the fust case my opinion is that the accusation is wrongfully made, and in the second I think the charge is correct."

"Can you undertake to get Rose Foster off?" demanded the prince, now coming direct to the point.

"I can't say, but I think I might," responded Mr. Grumley.

"And Caroline Walters, would it be impossible, utterly impossible —" said the prince, hesitatingly.

"Nothink is impossible, may it please your Royal Highness," observed Grumley; "but there's a many things that is wery difficult, all the same."

"But you are not the man to be daunted by difficulties," remarked the heir apparent.

"Just the last feller in all creation to give up anythink in despair," returned the constable. "Me and Mobbs is the most desperatest chaps in England when we've got a partickler pint in view; and when the means doesn't turn up of their own accord, we makes 'em."

"I see that you are an enterprising man, Mr. Grumley," observed the prince. "Now, the truth is that these girls who are in custody have been in the service of Mrs. Brace, and as I take a deep interest in everything that concerns Mrs. Brace —"

"I don't want no explanations and no apologies," interrupted the officer, perceiving with his natural quickness that the prince had special reasons of his own for the course he was pursuing. "If your Royal Highness wishes that them young gals should be got off, I'll do my best, and Mobbs shall do his best also. But it will cost summut handsome —"

"Not a word more upon that subject," interrupted the prince. "Mrs. Brace will give you five hundred guineas as an earnest of future generosity, and if you succeed in the matter, another sum to the like amount shall be yours."

"I'm very much obleeged to your Royal Highness, very much indeed," said Grumley, with a low bow; and he then turned to follow the milliner away from the apartment.

CHAPTER XIX

THE EXAMINATION

It was midday, and the police office at Bow Street was crowded to excess. The intelligence that a young and beautiful girl was about to be examined on a charge of committing the foul crime of murder had spread like wild-fire; and although the morning papers contained not a line upon the subject, — for news was not published so speedily in those times as it is at present, — yet the entire metropolis had already experienced the sensation of mingled interest and horror invariably attendant upon the circulation of such a rumour. The result was that numbers of persons had been impelled by curiosity to the police court, which was speedily filled; and an immense multitude, unable to obtain admittance, blocked up the street.

Presently a hackney-coach broke through the congregated mass and drove up to the door of the office. Then, when Rose Foster alighted in the custody of Grumley and Mobbs, instead of being saluted with the yells of execration usually poured forth on such occasions, the young girl's ears caught expressions of sympathy from every side. Nor few were the tongues which expressed a conviction that so sweet a creature could not possibly have committed the odious crime laid to her charge; and these observations enhanced that courage which now armed the poor orphan girl, the courage inspired by conscious innocence.

With modest dignity and with a winning maidenly reserve, as unaffected as every attribute of her virgin soul was guileless and artless, did Rose Foster pass from the hackney-coach along the passage leading to the office, on entering which she instantly became the focus for the looks of all present. A momentary faintness came over her, an evanescent dizzi-

ness made her stagger back a pace or two; but recovering herself even before the rude hands of Grumley were stretched forth to sustain her, the maiden ascended with a firm step into the dock.

And now the marks of sympathy which she had already received outside were renewed within; and several persons present were moved to tears at the contemplation of that sweetly interesting young creature, so mild and innocent in looks, so touchingly beautiful, and so modest in demeanour, accused of a crime totally incompatible with her seemingly gentle nature.

Near the magistrate the Honourable Arthur Eaton was seated. A profound melancholy sat like a sombre shadow upon the countenance of the young man; and the moment that Rose Foster was conducted into the court, he fixed upon her a long, searching, penetrating look, as if to fathom the innermost recesses of her soul. Then, bewildered and baffled, not knowing how to believe her guilty, yet not daring to give his own convictions the lie by pronouncing her innocent, full of uncertainty and of grief, pained and anguished at the idea that so much turpitude was possibly concealed by an equally consummate hypocrisy, Arthur Eaton withdrew his eyes from the pale countenance on which dwelt all the serenity of conscious virtue.

In a little box or pew on the right hand of the magistrate sat a barrister dressed in his wig and gown. He was a short, thin, pale-faced man, with hatchet features, compressed lips, and keen, searching eyes which went wandering restlessly about the court, but appeared to settle for an instant upon every countenance, one after another. This was Counsellor Sharply, one of the most noted Old Bailey barristers, and whom Mr. Grumley had lost no time in engaging the instant he had received the five hundred guineas from Mrs. Brace. Not that Mr. Grumley had any particular instructions to give Counsellor Sharply in the matter; but he had told the learned gentleman to watch the case narrowly, — a general hint that he was to throw as much discredit upon the prosecution as possible.

And now the proceedings commenced by the magistrate inquiring the name of the prisoner.

"Your worship," said Counsellor Sharply, rising and bowing politely to the bench, "I appear for Miss Rose

Foster, the young lady who has the misfortune to stand before you."

"Her name is Rose Foster, then?" observed the magistrate, inquiringly.

"That is her name, your worship," responded the barrister; "and I may add that she has been for some weeks in the service of Mrs. Brace, the well-known and highly respectable milliner of Pall Mall. This lady, who, by the way, enjoys the patronage of all the aristocracy, has entrusted me with the defence of Miss Foster; for Mrs. Brace is well assured that there must be some fearful mistake in the charge so far as it applies to the young lady whom your worship will presently release from custody."

This address was delivered with the insinuating smile which gentlemen of the long robe so well know how to assume at times; and the magistrate nodded once or twice, as much as to say, "Well, I dare say it will be so; but we shall see."

"I should like to state, your worship," observed Mr. Grumley, in his hoarse bassoon voice, "that what Counsellor Sharply says is perfectly correct. I made inquiries down in Pall Mall just now, and Mrs. Brace assured me that a better young gal or one less likely to do wrong never broke bread. Mrs. Brace is a highly respectable lady, your worship, and will come for'ard if required to speak to the prisoner's character."

"Very well, Mr. Grumley," said the magistrate; "we shall see all about that presently. Now let us hear the charge."

The Honourable Arthur Eaton stood up and immediately responded to his name, which was called by the clerk. He deposed as follows:

"It was about eight o'clock last evening that I proceeded to visit certain buildings which are in progress of construction near Barnsbury Park, on the northern outskirt of London. I was accompanied by my valet, William Dudley. The workmen had previously left, and we were alone, or fancied ourselves to be alone, on the premises. Dudley lighted a lantern, by the aid of which we inspected all that had been done to the edifice since the preceding night. There is a small courtyard in the centre, from which four passages branch off. We were walking along one of these passages, when I took the lantern from Dudley's hand and paused a

moment to examine something that had struck me to be a defect in the wall. Dudley continued advancing in front, and he had just entered the courtyard, when a cry burst from his lips, and he fell down heavily. I rushed forward, and at the very same moment that I thus bounded into the yard by one passage, I caught a glimpse of a female dressed in black plunging into another passage on the opposite side. I did not pursue her because I was struck motionless by the horrible spectacle which met my eyes. William Dudley lay a corpse at my feet. For nearly a minute I must have remained spellbound, — speechless, paralyzed, transfixed with dread horror. At length the very excess of anguish forced me into motion; my limbs were unlocked, my tongue became unloosened. Raising the cry of 'Murder,' I fell upon my knees, by the side of the bleeding victim, and I know not how long a period elapsed, but certainly not many minutes, ere some labourers appeared, dragging in a female dressed in black. The instant that I caught sight of the mourning garments and heard her screams, I naturally concluded that she was the murderess, and I believe that I said so at the time."

"But you did not catch a glimpse of the face of the female figure whom you saw flitting away from the scene of the murder?" exclaimed Counsellor Sharply.

"No, I saw not the face then," exclaimed Eaton.

"And you cannot swear that the female figure seen in the first instance was the prisoner at the bar?"

"That would be swearing to the effect that I know beyond all doubt that the prisoner at the bar is the murderess," replied Eaton; "whereas I should be sorry to make an averment half so positive. And I beg you to believe," he added, emphatically, "that I sincerely, ardently, unfeignedly hope her innocence will transpire."

"No doubt it will," exclaimed Counsellor Sharply: though at the moment he did not precisely see how such a consummation was to be reached, for the evidence was certainly of a most damnatory nature against his client.

He then proceeded to cross-question Mr. Eaton, who frankly admitted that he knew of no possible reason which could induce the prisoner to assassinate his valet. It evidently was not for the sake of plunder, inasmuch as the murderess must have seen him (Eaton) inside the passage

with the lantern in his hand, at the instant she struck the blow; and consequently she was well aware, when striking it, that she must save herself by flight the moment afterward and could not remain to rifle her victim. Mr. Eaton likewise stated that Miss Foster was a total stranger to him; nor had he ever heard her name mentioned by William Dudley, much less seen them together.

One of the labourers who had arrested Rose was then examined; and he stated the circumstance under which he and his companions had been induced to detain her.

Mr. Counsellor Sharply now elicited the important fact that whereas it was by a passage running in a northern direction from the courtyard that Mr. Eaton had seen the female figure disappear, it was on the southern side of the building that Rose Foster was flying so precipitately when she was encountered and captured by the labourers.

A surgeon who had examined the body of the deceased was now summoned, and he described the nature of the wound which had caused his death. He likewise produced the weapon with which the fatal deed was accomplished, and he declared that the blow must have been inflicted by an arm that was either endowed with great strength, or else nerved at the moment by the most malignant passions.

At this declaration all eyes were turned upon Rose Foster, and every one felt how inconsistent the black deed was with the ingenuousness stamped upon that sweet, pensive countenance, and how incompatible was its violence with the grace and lightness of that rounded arm.

"Hand me the weapon, if you please, sir," said Counsellor Sharply to the surgeon.

This demand was instantaneously complied with; and the barrister observed that it was a large clasp-knife originally provided with two blades, but one of which had been broken close off at the haft. The other, which had inflicted the death-wound, was about six inches long, pointed like a dagger, and sharp as a razor.

While turning this weapon over and over in his hand, and affecting to regard it with the closest scrutiny, though in reality only gaining time to rack his imagination what question to ask next, the counsellor suddenly observed something on the handle which induced him to ask for a towel and some water. These were speedily brought, and

in the midst of a breathless silence did he with his own hand wash away the blood that was encrusted upon the buckhorn handle of the knife. Then, having examined it with a real attention, he whispered something to Mr. Peter Grumley, who in his turn scrutinized the knife with a vivid keenness of look; and his man Mobbs was next admitted to this consultation, the nature of which, although it took place in open court, was still confined to the three persons who were engaged in it.

Mobbs shook his head knowingly, Grumley whispered to the counsellor, and the learned gentleman himself, drawing his gown over his shoulders with a very important air, addressed the magistrate in the following terms:

" From something which has transpired, your worship, and which it will be inconvenient to mention at this stage of the proceedings, I have to request that the examination be postponed for about a couple of hours. It is now two o'clock, and if your worship would not object to take the case again at four — "

" I can have no objection to accede to the learned gentleman's request," observed the magistrate.

Counsellor Sharply then looked significantly at Grumley and Mobbs, both of whom disappeared immediately from the police office.

" Now," exclaimed the learned gentleman, wrapping up the knife in a piece of brief-paper, " I have to request your worship to retain this weapon locked up in your desk until the renewal of the examination."

This demand was likewise acceded to; and the counsellor then wrote a few words upon a slip of paper, which he folded carefully and handed to the magistrate. This functionary read its contents with evident surprise, and for a few moments appeared uncertain how to act. Meantime Rose Foster and all the spectators were gazing upon him with the most breathless suspense and even torturing interest; for it was quite clear that some incident of vital importance had developed itself in favour of the young and beautiful accused.

" If your worship hesitates," said Counsellor Sharply, in a determined but respectful tone, " I shall make the demand not only aloud, but in a far more formal manner."

" Perhaps this proceeding will be the best, Mr. Sharply,"

observed the magistrate, glancing significantly at the paper, " and I accordingly act in compliance with your wishes."

Then, without any further hesitation, he handed the slip to the Honourable Arthur Eaton, who appeared perfectly wonder-stricken by its contents. The colour went and came with extraordinary rapidity upon his cheeks, and when he endeavoured to speak, his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. At length he found words to express his feelings, and, starting from his seat, he exclaimed, " I protest with indignation — "

" Silence, sir! The case is adjourned; clear the court! " cried the magistrate.

" Clear the court! " shouted the usher; and the half-dozen constables and runners lurking about began to bundle the spectators out of the place, so that the din thus created entirely drowned the words of Arthur Eaton, who was continuing to address the magistrate and Counsellor Sharply in an animated and excited manner.

Rose Foster was removed from the dock and conducted to a private room, where she found Mrs Brace seated before the fire, weeping bitterly.

The young maiden started back on recognizing the milliner; but remembering certain assurances which had been conveyed to her by Mr. Grumley, she advanced toward the woman through whose agency she had experienced so much persecution and misery. But Mrs. Brace caught her in her arms, and straining her vehemently to her bosom, murmured, " Pardon me, dear Rose, pardon me, for all that I have done."

" Ah, madam, I am not vindictive," said the young girl, bursting into tears; " and if you are really sorry for everything you have made me suffer — "

" I am, I am, my God! believe that I am! " cried the milliner, shedding her crocodile torrents over the generous maiden who was confiding and unsophisticated enough, despite all her bitter experience, to put faith in the professed sincerity of the vile woman's compunction.

" Then do I pardon you, Mrs. Brace, yes, with a true Christian forgiveness," said Rose. " And I even feel bound to express my gratitude toward you for interesting yourself in my behalf this day, likewise for the assurances you sent me by the constable."

" What did he tell you, my love? " demanded Mrs. Brace. " Let me know all he said, that I may see whether he delivered my message properly and completely."

" He told me that yourself and the prince had paid him a very large sum of money to take my cause in hand and make my innocence transpire," said Rose; " and that yourself and his Royal Highness were well satisfied that I am innocent. He moreover advised me to leave everything to the barrister whom he had retained in my behalf, and besought me to spare the prince and you in any statement that I might unavoidably be called upon to make in order to account for my wandering abroad last night. He added that my innocence was sure to be rendered apparent, and that on being discharged he was authorized to give me a hundred guineas on your behalf, and either recommend me to some respectable family or see me safe off by coach to any country place whither I might choose to repair. This was the sum of the communications made to me by the tall, stout constable."

" And you may perceive, my dear Rose," observed Mrs. Brace, " that the prince and myself are deeply penitent for all we have caused you to undergo. You have forgiven me as a Christian — I dare not ask you to look upon me again as a friend. Nevertheless, I will act as one toward you; and please God that your innocence becomes manifest today."

" Oh, is there any doubt of it? Can there be any uncertainty in the case? " exclaimed Rose, suddenly alarmed by the milliner's observation. " What means this prorogation of the hearing? What meant all that mystery respecting the knife? And what was the reason that Mr. Eaton became so powerfully affected at the end of the proceedings? "

" You forget, my love," answered Mrs. Brace, " that I have not been present at the examination. I have been waiting here in the cruellest suspense, and in tears, as you found me. All I know is that something important suddenly transpired in your favour, and that the renewal of the investigation promises to be characterized by the most vivid, startling, and thrilling interest."

" Alas! alas! if circumstantial evidence should prevail against me! " murmured Rose, clasping her hands convulsively at the bare idea of being consigned to that gaol which

bears a name that makes even the innocent tremble — the name of Newgate.

"Do not give way to despondency, my dear child," said Mrs. Brace, in so soothing a tone and lavishing such tender caresses at the same time that the poor orphan girl not only forgave her from her heart for the past, but felt comforted and cheered by the maternal affection displayed with so much apparent warmth toward her.

CHAPTER XX

A MAGNANIMOUS WOMAN

WHILE the preceding incidents were occurring at the police office in Bow Street, a scene which we must interrupt our narrative to describe was taking place at Carlton House.

For it was a little after twelve at noon on this memorable day, and the prince had just achieved his morning toilet, when he was startled by a knock at the door leading to the private staircase.

Dismissing Germain, his Royal Highness hastened to answer the summons, and the Amazon entered the magnificent apartment.

"Ah! my sweet and mysterious visitress of the dark hours," ejaculated the heir apparent; but he stopped short suddenly, for the handsome countenance of the lady wore an expression of severity verging upon sternness, and she made an impatient gesture as much as to imply that she was in no humour for jocularity.

The prince closed the door, and drawing himself haughtily up to his full height, he said, "May I ask what has procured me the honour of this second visit from Lady Lade within a few hours, and what is the reason that she wears a gloomy aspect?"

"Has your Royal Highness nothing wherewith to reproach yourself?" demanded the Amazon, fixing her large dark eyes full upon him.

"Doubtless I am culpable of many small vices, in which, if I recollect, your ladyship has borne a share," responded the prince, now assuming a tone of irony: "once in yonder bathroom, and last night — "

"Oh, you may affect satire to your heart's content, prince," exclaimed the huntress, her splendid countenance

becoming crimson with indignation. "But permit me to inquire whether that latter weakness on my part to which you allude — I mean my visit to this chamber last night — engendered any misgiving in your mind?"

"In good sooth, my sweet friend," said the prince, still maintaining an ironical tone in revenge for the proud bearing and severe looks assumed by the Amazon, "in good sooth, I was inspired with some partial misgiving and vague suspicion of a sinister purpose on your side, not, however, by the circumstance of your kind visit of love and pleasure, but by the mystery attending your disappearance."

"And the brandy which we drank together?" said the huntress, now smiling with malicious archness.

"Ah! by Jove, I remember," exclaimed the prince, starting uneasily. "Come, my dear Letitia," he continued, suddenly assuming a conciliatory tone and manner, "tell me what is the meaning of this change in your aspect toward me, and how I have offended you. For that there is something wrong — "

"You are well aware," added Lady Letitia, finishing the sentence for him. "Well, it is useless to bandy words in this manner; and therefore I will at once confess that I had a special and sinister purpose in visiting your Royal Highness during the past night, and that purpose I accomplished."

"Yes, you became my bedfellow — " began the prince, unable to suppress a sneer.

"A truce to flippancy," exclaimed the huntress. "This matter is serious, and your Royal Highness beholds before you a woman who is as strong in her resolution to work out a settled plan as she is frail and yielding in the school of love. In a word, then, I have vowed to effect the restoration of Meagles, or at least to avenge him."

"Ah! it is as I more than half-feared," muttered the prince, changing colour. Then, fixing upon the Amazon a look full of that fiendish malignity which formed no inconsiderable element of his disposition, he said, "Beware how you wage war against me, Letitia, for I will crush you as if you were a worm."

"I defy you, by Heaven! I defy you!" exclaimed the huntress, her eyes filling with a more than usual radiancy, her countenance becoming of the richest carnation. "Nay,

look not so black upon me. Your brow may lower with storms, but your eyes shoot forth no lightnings that kill. For once you have to deal with a woman who will fight you with any weapons that you choose to name. Shall it be swords or pistols? Oh, no, no, the courage of your Royal Highness cannot be screwed up to such a pitch," said the Amazon, accenting her words with a cutting bitterness. " Shall it be treachery and intrigue? Ah! there you are more proficient and likewise more daring, because snakes creep out of sight, through the long grass, and then insidiously sting their victims."

" By the living God! I will not endure this insulting language," exclaimed the prince, becoming purple in the face. " Depart, woman, or I will summon my lackeys to thrust you ignominiously forth."

" Dare to call a single domestic hither," said the Amazon, in a calm but determined tone, " and I will horsewhip him as soundly as I will presently thrash your Royal Highness if you dare to menace me with such insolence again. For mark me, and tremble," she exclaimed, with a strong emphasis. Then, after a few moments' pause, during which she kept her eyes dauntlessly and defiantly fixed upon the prince, she added, " You are in my power, completely in my power."

The royal voluptuary trembled from head to foot with a rage to which he dared not give vent; for he saw that there was a sternness of purpose on the part of the Amazon which must be well backed by a consciousness of possessing that power which she proclaimed herself to hold in terror over him.

" Now listen to me with attention," she said, " and see whether I have been putting forth idle vapourings and empty boastings. Last night I visited your chamber with a special object in view, and to gain that object I prostituted myself to your embraces, which were loathsome to me. But it was necessary to my plan that I should send you into a deep slumber, and I became your bedfellow in order to obtain an opportunity of practising that cajolery which would induce you to drink from the glass that I had drugged beforehand."

" But this was the foulest treachery, the most damnable perfidy that woman ever practised," exclaimed the prince, casting looks of demoniac hatred upon the Amazon.

" Not worse than the treachery and the perfidy which your Royal Highness practised toward the man who had been so good a friend to you," returned the huntress, her coral lips thus shooting forth the sharpest arrows. " But now shall you learn the purpose which I had in view last night, and this explanation will afford the key to that mystery which places you in my power. In a word, then, Prince of Wales, I have possessed myself of your most secret, most valuable papers."

His Royal Highness staggered back as if suddenly struck with the sharp blow of a hammer, for all the fearful truth broke upon him in an instant, and he saw that he was indeed in the power of a woman who was not likely to surrender up the surreptitiously acquired talisman of her influence until all her objects were fully accomplished.

" Listen again," she resumed, after a short pause, " and I will tell you how I discovered that it was you through whose agency poor Meagles was sent out of the country. The other morning his landlady received a letter stating in concise terms that he had been detected in treasonable designs against the sovereign, but that through the leniency of the paternal government he was permitted to repair without delay to North America, on condition that he never again return to his native land. This letter was shown to me, and I instantly saw therein the evidences of some infernal treachery. But my suspicions did not at once fall upon your Royal Highness. On the contrary, I rather fancied that it was some device of your despotic father, the king, to rob you of the services of a man who was so faithful and so devoted. But when I learned that on the very same day when Meagles disappeared your valet Germain had been to his lodgings, had remained there for a short time, and had then taken his departure, with some frivolous excuse, it struck me like an inspiration that there was something wrong. My suspicions were thus directed into the right channel; and on examining Meagles's writing desk, I saw enough to convince me that some one had been there already. It was not then very difficult to put two and two together, and I resolved to take up my friend's cause with a more zealous championship than if it were my own. The campaign has been opened, it commenced last night, and the advantage remains to me. By a little stratagem, a

PORTRAIT OF MRS. FITZHERBERT

Photogravure after painting by Cosway

PORTRAIT OF MRS. FITZHERBERT
Photogravure after painting by Cosway

great object was achieved. The papers, those valuable, those important papers, are in my possession; and I am now here to dictate my own terms to you, the discomfited, the defeated, the humiliated enemy."

"Meagles deserved all that has happened to him," said the prince, in a thick, hoarse voice and with a dogged manner, "for he stole the papers from me in the first instance, and it was by their aid that you and he overawed my father."

"We will not dispute upon the point," responded the Amazon, calmly and resolutely. "Suffice it for my purpose and for you to know that the papers are now in my hands. Yes, the Lightfoot certificate, which proves your father to be a perjured miscreant and a cold-blooded traitor to a young, lovely, and confiding woman whose heart he doubtless broke — "

"Calumniate not your king!" exclaimed the prince, trembling with rage.

"Then the documents proving your own marriage with Mrs. Fitzherbert," continued the Amazon, heedless of the interruption, "a marriage which, if proclaimed to the public, would lose you the crown that you hope to wear — "

"Ah! do you dare menace me?" cried the prince, clenching his fists and grinding his teeth.

"Then the correspondence which shows that this same Mrs. Fitzherbert, your own wife," proceeded the remorseless Amazon, "became the paramour of the Marquis of Bellois, the mother of a child, too — "

"Fiend! devil! demoness!" ejaculated the heir apparent, stamping his feet with fury and extending his arms menacingly toward the huntress.

"Rage on, rage on, I defy you!" she exclaimed; and her musical laugh rang through the chamber.

"The papers,— you have them about your person,— yes, the plunder is concealed beneath your garments," cried the prince, in a hoarse, thick voice and in broken sentences. "But, by the eternal God, I will tear them from you, I will rend your garments to shreds, I will murder you, sooner than let you escape me."

And with a species of savage yell, such as a hyena sends forth when goaded into fury, he sprang toward the huntress.

But, nimble and agile as the young fawn in the forest, the lady darted aside; and at the same moment a bright dagger

which she drew from the bosom of her frock coat gleamed across the eyes of the prince.

" Touch me, and I strike," she exclaimed, her handsome countenance suddenly expressing an implacable sternness.

For nearly a minute his Royal Highness stood gazing upon her, uncertain how to act. His white and quivering lips denoted the fell passions of the malignant coward; for he could have found it in his heart to murder her then and there, had he not dreaded to encounter the sharp poniard which the Amazon displayed so suddenly.

" It is useless for us to quarrel thus, Letitia," he said, at length. " Let us come to terms."

" Yes, but I must dictate them," was the response.

" Put up your weapon, and we will look the matter calmly in the face," cried the prince.

" Oh, I am not afraid to give you even the chance of falling upon me unawares," exclaimed the Amazon, as she returned the dagger to its sheath in the bosom of her garment.

" Do you take me for an assassin? " demanded his Royal Highness, flinging upon her a ferocious look.

" Since you ask me the question," replied the huntress, coolly, " I will candidly confess that there are no crimes of which I deem you to be incapable."

The prince bit bis lip till the blood stained his teeth. Oh, if he could only have rung the bell and given that woman into custody, if he could only have sent her after Meagles across the seas! But no, he dared not; for the papers which she possessed contained secrets involving his honour and his heirship to the crown. He was therefore compelled to smother his rancour, stifle his hatred, eat the words that rose to his lips, and swallow the retorts which his indignation prompted. And this was a terrible, terrible humiliation for the first gentleman in Europe to endure.

" Let us keep to the point immediately before us," he said, after a long pause. " The terms upon which you will surrender the papers, all the papers without reserve — "

" Those terms are easily dictated," interrupted the Amazon. " In the first place, Mr. Meagles must be restored to his country and his friends."

" I will procure an order from the Minister to that effect," said the prince.

" I would not trust the government a whit more than I will

you," rejoined Lady Lade. "Bad kings and princes make bad Ministers, and such is now the case in this wretched country."

"Well, Meagles shall be restored," said his Royal Highness, again biting his lip to restrain the wrath that cost him such severe struggles to prevent it from boiling over.

"Meagles shall be restored, you say? Good! That is the first point. The second," continued the Amazon, "is that he be raised to the peerage on the day of your marriage with Caroline of Brunswick, and that a pension of five thousand a year be settled upon him at the same time."

"Letitia, you are mad," exclaimed the prince, now more amazed than even angry.

"Well, if you are afraid to ask your royal father for those boons," said the huntress, coolly, "I must repair to Windsor myself. It will not be the first time that I shall have demanded of his Majesty a peerage and a pension for some one on your behalf; and provided with such important documents, it is not likely that the king will refuse my prayer."

"No, no, you need not visit Windsor a second time," exclaimed the prince. "Come, I assent to the second condition, — a peerage and pension for Meagles on my wedding-day. And that is all, I hope?"

"Yes, I have nothing more to stipulate," answered the Amazon. "But I may as well inform your Royal Highness that the papers are not about my person, nor are they accessible to you. Well concealed are they now, and well concealed will they remain until the fulfilment of the conditions just laid down. You may employ bravos to waylay and murder me, but my death would not give you back your papers. On the contrary, they would fall into the hands of persons less scrupulous than I, and instead of reaping any advantage from the crime, your ruin would ensue. I give you this warning, because I am fully aware that the idea of sending me to an eternal sleep has flashed through your brain more than once during the last quarter of an hour. You will therefore now do so at your peril."

Thus speaking, the Amazon turned away and moved toward the private door, while his Royal Highness, astounded at the fact of her having read his thoughts so easily, remained transfixed and petrified with horror and amazement.

"By the bye," she said, stopping short and looking over

her shoulder, "there must be a period fixed for the fulfilment of the conditions just settled between us. The matter can't go on for everlasting, you know. I suppose that poor Meagles has been hurried off to America in a ship-of-war? The people of England have to support navies in order that they may become instruments of oppression against themselves. God's curse will light upon such a paternal government," she added, bitterly. "But that is not the point. We were talking of Meagles, and you will do well to have a fast sailing vessel sent after him; for I accord six weeks, and no more, for the fulfilment of our terms. If that interval elapses without seeing Meagles return, then will I publish the papers. Farewell."

And having thus spoken, the magnanimous huntress quitted the royal apartment, leaving the Prince of Wales more humiliated, more disgusted with himself and all the world, and more disposed to abandon himself to despair than ever he had been before. Indeed, to tell the full truth, he was just in that humour when for a cup of the waters of oblivion he would have sold his soul to Satan.

CHAPTER XXI

THE WORKING MAN'S WIFE AND CHILDREN

And now we have another scene to relate, which occurred contemporaneously with those described in the two preceding chapters, and to which we must direct attention ere we can return to the police office and resume the adventures of Rose Foster.

For while she was standing in the dock, soon after twelve, on this memorable day, and while the Amazon was exhibiting the magnanimous heroism of her character to the Prince of Wales, a sad and pitiable spectacle might have been seen in that garret where the wife and children of Melmoth, the working man, were huddling together.

But the working man himself was not there. The letter which he had written, and which was in the same style as that penned by Meagles, had been duly received by the unhappy woman, to whose heart it had appeared to carry the blight of death. For now did she feel herself widowed, now did she look upon her children as fatherless; and in addition to this appalling misery was the crushing idea that he, the man whom she loved so fondly, he the husband of herself and the father of her children, that he was plunged into the bitterest, deepest despair.

Oh, as that poor woman pressed her babe to her breast and cast around her eyes upon the other three children who sat near looking up into her worn countenance as if seeking for consolation there, but finding all a hopeless blank or else the sombre gloom of despair, as she thus threw her hot and tearless eyes around and at a glance embraced the unfortunate beings who were left dependent solely upon her, it seemed as if her heart-strings would snap suddenly and she must sink down beneath the intolerable load of her misfortune.

A husband torn away from a sickly, dying wife, a father from four children, the eldest of whom was a mere boy and the youngest a babe at the breast. Oh, it was too much to be borne, too much even for a strong woman to endure, and therefore enough to crush altogether that poor ailing creature who had already seen so much misery.

The reader will remember that Melmoth had robbed Meagles one night and that Meagles had subsequently bade him keep the gold, which was indeed at the time intended to relieve him. Comforts had then been introduced to the garret; but the working man would not remove into a better lodging for fear of absorbing his little store ere he should succeed in obtaining employment. Then it happened that he had about his person all his treasure at the moment when he became involved in the adventure which hurried him with such rapidity through the mock-trial at the Home Office, the journey to Woolwich, and the embarkation in the boat whence he plunged so desperately into the Thames on the night of pitchy darkness. But we must observe that when he had penned his brief and formal note, as dictated to him by the hirelings of despotic authorities, he had entrusted his gold, together with that letter, to the peace-officer, who undertook to deliver both next morning in London; but the villainous messenger left the note at the proper address, and retained the money for himself. Yes, all, every farthing did the officer keep. Not the smallest mite did he spare for the woman who was made, as it were, a widow and the children who were in like manner rendered fatherless.

And thus the few comforts which had been gathered in that garret, and the vesture which had been redeemed from pledge, all found their way back to the pawnbroker's to furnish the means of procuring bread. Woeful fate! heart-rending and agonizing was it for that poor mother to see article after article disappear, swallowed up by the ravenous maw of the monster Pauperism. And as she, day by day, saw the garret coming back to its recent state of misery, and her children lapsing into the shivering, shuddering chill of seminudity, and the landlady's looks waxing blacker and more suspicious as the weekly rent-day was approaching, the poor creature felt that she could have lain herself down to die, had it not been necessary to live on as well and as long as she could for the sake of her children.

And now the morning had arrived when the pittance was to be paid for the garret, and it was the same day as that on which the incidents of the preceding chapters took place.

Scarcely had noon been proclaimed by all the clocks of the metropolis, — those faithful servitors of Old Time with their iron tongues, — when the sharp, ominous, expected tap at the door was heard, and Mrs. Thomas, the vixenish landlady, entered the garret.

" Well, Mrs. Melmoth, how be you to-day? " asked the woman, affecting a civil tone, although she more than half-suspected that she should have to change it in a minute; for the distress of the poor family was no secret to her, her lynx eyes having marked every article that was taken out by the eldest boy to pledge.

" Mrs. Thomas, I am very ill, and nearly driven to despair with misery and anguish," replied the poor woman; " and what is worse," she added, bursting into tears, " I am even unable to pay you the trifle — "

" I knowed it," ejaculated the landlady, smacking her hand against the wall as a substitute for the table which she would have struck if there had been one there. " I am robbed as completely as if I was stopped on the highway."

" Robbed! Oh, no, no," moaned Mrs. Melmoth. " Though poor, ay, destitute, we are honest."

" There ain't no such a thing as honesty amongst poor folks," shrieked the landlady. " I tell you I've been robbed with my eyes hopen, and I'll prove it. Hasn't the things which should have been left for me to put the brokers in upon, hasn't they been removed under my wery nose — "

" They have, they have indeed," sobbed Mrs. Melmoth, pressing her babe to her bosom and endeavouring to calm the other children, who began to cry; " but everything has been made away with to procure bread."

" The rent should be paid first," ejaculated Mrs. Thomas. " Now what am I to tell my landlord when he comes and asks for his money, which he will do this evening, and I'm just the half-crown short — "

" Surely, my dear Mrs. Thomas," interrupted the working man's wife, " you can trust me for a few days, till something turns up."

" Nothink won't turn up," cried the heartless vixen. " The government is a persecuting you and yourn, and they'll

hunt ye down to the dogs. But the chase sha'n't take place in my house, I can tell you. Besides, the tax-gatherer has already been and asked me why I keep such seditious, vickedly disposed people beneath my roof."

"You do not mean to turn us out?" exclaimed Mrs. Melmoth, casting a look of mingled terror and anguish upon the landlady.

"Yes, but I do though," was the withering, blighting response. "So tramp, be off —"

"Mercy! mercy!" screamed the poor mother; "if not for me, at least for this innocent babe, and those unfortunate children. My God! mercy! mercy!"

"No, tramp, be off, out with ye!" vociferated Mrs. Thomas, working herself up into a perfect fury. "Bundle, or I'll call in a constable."

"Come, then, my poor children — courage!" murmured Mrs. Melmoth, in a stifling voice, for she felt as if her heart must break. "Come, let us go forth into the street, and — and — beg."

As she uttered these last words, the poor woman staggered against the door-post and almost dropped the babe from her arms; for although she had often and often thought that to beggary her doom must lead, and although, for weeks and months past, her waking reveries by day and her dreams by night had depicted herself and all her children drawn up in a ghastly, ghostlike line in the public streets stretching forth the hand of mendicity, yet had she never dared breathe aloud the awful word itself until the present occasion. But now the appalling moment had arrived, the consummation of the calamity stared her in the face; she was already standing upon the threshold of that doom which she had so long foreseen and which now made her blood stagnate as if chilled in her veins.

And forth went the unhappy family, the inhuman landlady overwhelming them with reproaches because they were poor.

Oh, poverty is indeed a crime in this land of civilization and of Bible societies, in this country where religion is made so much of that there is a law to punish with the treadmill those who do not go to church, in this kingdom where a young lady at present reigns "by the grace of God."

But it was in the time of that diabolical old monster,

George III, the mad, scrofulous, and cold-bloodedly cruel grandfather of this same young lady to whom we have just alluded, it was in the time of that atrocious tyrant whom despicably sycophantic historians have covered with fulsome praises, but who was a scandal and a shame to human nature as well as a scourge and a curse to the human race, it was in his time, we say, that the working man's family turned out from their garret-home into the inclemency and houseless desolation of the open streets.

And now the oft foreshadowed doom was come at last, the long foreseen consummation was present, and the heart-broken mother of the crying, starving, shivering children found herself fated to teach them how to beg.

In Whitehall did they take their stand on this afternoon of their initiative in the arts and devices of mendicancy. But an initiative only was it, indeed; for nature, pure, unadulterated nature, traced that profound and ineffable sorrow upon the countenance of the mother, and gave that woe-begone aspect to the children. Art was not needed there; no, O God! no, the scene was all too true and all too natural.

Yes, in the great thoroughfare of Whitehall did Mrs. Melmoth take her stand, with the babe in her arms, the eldest boy and the girl on her right hand, and the youngest boy on her left. There, in that thoroughfare, where a king had once been so righteously put to death for making war on his people, that same king who is now falsely called a martyr, there was it that the working man's wife and children placed themselves to supplicate alms of the passers-by.

O working men of England, how many thousands, how many hundreds of thousands of ye have had your families go down into the streets to beg! Rise early, toil hard all day, eat of the scantiest and drink of the poorest the while, go to bed late, rise early again, pass through the same wretched routine of crushing labour and semistarvation day after day, — and what is the result? Ye cannot keep yourselves and your families from misery and wretchedness. No, destitution and then beggary or the workhouse come at last, and your end is either death on a dunghill, or death in a union, with the blessed certainty of a common deal coffin and a pauper's grave, while your children are left upon the world to go through all that you have suffered, meet the same experiences, pass through the same miseries, privations, woes, and heart-

breaking afflictions, and perish in the same way at last. Yes, working men of England, this is your doom, this is your fate. Ye who make silken textures for the indolent wealthy, are shivering in rags yourselves; ye who raise all the choicest fruits of the earth for the pampered, insolent, overbearing aristocrat are starving yourselves.

By the living God, all this is intolerable. It is enough to make ye atheists, infidels, unbelievers; and it assuredly is far more than sufficient to make ye chartists, republicans, and communists. The appalling misery and the monstrous oppression which exist in this country try your faith in God's mercy to the very uttermost; and if any one were to preach the doctrine that the world was nought save a huge, pitiless machine, uncared for by the Almighty but abandoned to the caprices and iniquities of Satan, ye would not be blamed if, yielding to the influence of your own bitter experience, ye believed therein.

But, no; the working men of England require not sophistry, much less metaphysics, to account for the evils which they endure. The causes are too palpable, too glaring, too apparent; and those causes we ourselves have proclaimed and denounced a thousand times, and shall continue to proclaim and denounce so long as there remains the smallest particle of misery in these realms. For the causes thus alluded to exist in our vitiated institutions, and chiefly our aristocracy, with its hereditary titles and its law of primogeniture, its usurpation of all the governmental and administrative powers of the state, its heartless tyranny and its cold-blooded avarice, its voluptuousness and luxury, maintained at the expense of starving millions and wide-spread injustice, its diabolical despotism, and its insatiable rapacity.

But we had almost forgotten that poor family whom we have just seen turned out into the streets, — turned out to beg, or starve.

Carriages, splendid equipages, rolled by; and the poor woman said to herself, in the blackness of her despair, " What have the children of that lady done that they should ride in so fine a coach, while mine are shivering and starving here? "

" Mother," whispered the eldest boy, and he pointed to his little sister, who had sunk down exhausted upon the cold pavement.

" O God, that we were all dead, that we were all dead! "

murmured Mrs. Melmoth, in a low tone, but with a concentrated bitterness such as she had never experienced nor displayed before; and, giving the babe to the eldest boy, she took up the little girl, pressed the poor child to her bosom, and covered her wan, thin face with kisses.

Oh, that was indeed a scene of misery, misery, misery! And here must we leave, for the present, the unfortunate woman with her starving children; yes, leave them there, in the open street, houseless, penniless, foodless, as so many, many thousands of the British working men's families are at all times houseless, penniless, foodless.

CHAPTER XXII

WHO IS THE CULPRIT?

PUNCTUALLY at four o'clock on this day of many and startling incidents, the case of Rose Foster was called on again at the police office in Bow Street; and the young girl once more entered the dock with a firm step. Her countenance was composed, though very pale; but a slight tint of the rose appeared softly on that colourless purity of the lily as she received an encouraging look from Counsellor Sharply as he entered the little box, or pew, on the right hand side of the magistrate. For in that rapid and only just perceptible glance the orphan read a certain satisfaction on the part of the barrister which convinced her that he entertained a good opinion of her case; and thus to a soul already fortified by conscious innocence was the anodyne of hope imparted, — that hope which resembles the dew that falls so gently, so silently, and yet so refreshingly upon the withering, half-blighted flower.

The look which Rose threw timidly around the court showed her that it was as densely crowded as in the earlier part of the day; but two circumstances instantaneously struck her as significant, — for in such a situation the veriest trifle assumes an importance which on ordinary occasions would be totally overlooked. The first was that Arthur Eaton no longer enjoyed the distinction of occupying a seat near the magistrate, but was placed in the body of the court, between the dock and the bench; and the other circumstance above alluded to was that neither Mr. Peter Grumley nor his factotum Mobbs was present.

"What course are you now about to pursue, Mr. Sharply?" inquired the magistrate, by way of reopening the proceedings.

"I purpose to begin by asking the Honourable Mr. Eaton

a few questions," said the learned gentleman, rising from his seat and drawing his gown over his shoulders.

"Do you wish me to enter the witness-box, sir?" demanded Arthur, whose manner was marked by a peculiarity which failed not to strike every one present; for there was a restless glitter in his eyes accompanied by a nervous quivering of the lips and an agitation of the entire being, which, coupled with the mysterious turn that the proceedings had appeared to take at the first examination, began to excite strange and startling suspicions in the minds of the spectators.

"No, sir, I do not wish you to enter this box," said Counsellor Sharply, with that significancy, or, rather, semisarcasm and covert irony in which barristers are so prone to indulge. "You can remain where you are — at least for the present," added the learned gentleman, with a deeper meaning, as he glanced encouragingly at Rose Foster.

But it was almost with a feeling of alarm that the young girl caught this look and comprehended its purport; for, when considered in connection with the mysterious observations in which the counsellor had been indulging, it appeared as if he meant to intimate the probability that Mr. Eaton would speedily change places with herself. And Rose was alarmed, because although she was deeply, deeply anxious that her own innocence should transpire, she was shocked at the thought that he who had appeared as the principal witness against her could possibly be himself the perpetrator of the crime. A film came over her eyes, a dizziness passed through her brain, and a sickness seized upon her heart, for her generous nature experienced the same boundless compassion for Arthur Eaton which he himself had all along felt for her; and moreover, her confidence in human nature was suddenly prostrated by the idea that a young man with so ingenuous a countenance, a brow whereon such noble thoughts seemed impressed, and eyes wherein all lofty emotions might be read, — her soul sank cowering down, we say, with alarm and anguish at the thought that the being created after the image of God was capable of such tremendous hypocrisy.

But this sensation of physical and mental faintness was as evanescent as it was profound; and all the young girl's ideas fell back again into their proper channels and she was recalled completely to herself when Counsellor Sharply began to question the Honourable Arthur Eaton.

"It appeared, sir, by your statement of this morning," said the learned gentleman, "that from the courtyard of the building where the tragedy took place, four passages branch off; and you beheld your female figure dressed in black rush up the passage leading due north. Was it not so?"

"It was so," answered Mr. Eaton, in a tone which appeared alike gloomy and impatient.

"And you heard another witness declare it was on the southern side of the buildings that the prisoner was stopped by himself and others?" said Mr. Sharply, with an interrogative accentuation.

"I heard that point established in evidence," responded Eaton; "and I once more proclaim that I shall be delighted to see the innocence of the young lady in the dock fully established."

"Perhaps you will be gratified, sir," remarked the counsellor, drily and laconically. "Now, sir," he continued, "will you be so kind as to state whether you were always on good terms with your valet, William Dudley."

"If there be any harm that I might say of the dead," exclaimed Arthur Eaton, indignantly, "I would sooner die myself than reveal it."

This answer produced a breathless amazement throughout the court, astonishing even Counsellor Sharply himself, who, in truth, had merely put one of those haphazard and random questions which barristers so frequently ask, and to which they are far from anticipating any important result.

"Then there is harm which you know and can proclaim in reference to the deceased William Dudley?" said the learned gentleman, fixing his keen, searching eyes upon the young gentleman, who was evidently much pained and agitated by the sudden turn which the proceedings were taking. "Come, sir, let us have a frank, honest, and straightforward answer, if you please," added Mr. Sharply, who was now looking so uncommonly knowing that all the spectators really fancied he had purposely entered upon this particular line of examination, instead of having fallen into it by one of those mere hazards which so often bring the most unexpected fish to the legal net which forensic artifice throws out.

"Your worship, I appeal to you — " began Arthur Eaton, his agitation increasing every moment.

"Sir, you must answer the learned gentleman's questions," responded the magistrate, with a curtness evincing the unfavourable impression already made upon his mind in respect to Eaton.

"Then I at once and emphatically decline to explain any of the antecedents connected with the murdered Dudley," said the young gentleman, suddenly recovering a composure and a firmness which might have arisen from a consummate hardihood as well as from those generous feelings which in reality prompted his conduct; but inasmuch as the true motives which swayed him at the time were totally unknown and of course unsuspected in that court, every one present looked upon him as displaying that dogged defiance and bold-fronted obstinacy with which the perpetrators of enormous crimes so frequently endeavour to arm themselves.

"Remember, Mr. Eaton," said the magistrate, leaning over his desk and speaking in a low but earnest tone to the young gentleman, "remember, Mr. Eaton, the equivocal position in which you stand; and take notice that the fullest and most satisfactory explanation is required at the hands of every one situated as you now are."

"Let Mr. Sharply detail the grounds of those suspicions which he has dared to allege as existing against me," exclaimed Mr. Eaton, in a loud tone and with an air of superb indignation, "and I shall know how to answer him."

"But he has a right to question you, Mr. Eaton, on preliminary matters," observed the magistrate.

"Then, in reference to William Dudley," said the young gentleman, after a few moments' profound reflection, "I will state this much, that some short time ago I had reason, much reason, to be dissatisfied with him; but I pardoned him, and the influence of that forgiveness on my part produced the most salutary results. In a word, William Dudley became a man whom I would have trusted with untold gold; and the proof of my excellent opinion of him may be found in the fact that I had purposed and promised to place him at the head of the institution for which the building where he met his death is intended."

"I must now question you upon another point, Mr. Eaton," said Counsellor Sharply, who was beginning to won-

der why Grumley and Mobbs did not make their appearance. "You have already admitted, in your examination of this morning, that Miss Foster was, so far as you are aware, totally unknown to William Dudley and that you cannot conceive any possible motive which she could have for the crime at present imputed to her. Now, will you please to inform me whether the deceased was connected, in any shape or way, with any woman who might have a motive in causing his death? Any love affair, any vengeance that might seek its bloody gratification — "

"Ah! it is possible," murmured Arthur Eaton, a ray of light darting in unto his soul with the vividness of the electric fluid flashing through a dark chamber; and, pressing his hand to his brow, he remained standing thus for nearly a minute, absorbed in the deepest, most painful thought.

For, all on a sudden, had the suspicion sprung up in his mind that Fernanda, the vindictive, unsparing, merciless Fernanda, might have done the atrocious deed. Hitherto circumstantial evidence had so completely pointed toward Rose Foster, that the young gentleman was compelled, as we have already said, to yield to his convictions, against his inclinations, and believe her guilty. And although the web of testimony surrounding Rose had appeared to spread out and enmesh himself, yet, knowing himself to be innocent, he naturally concluded that the net, despite of all Counsellor Sharply's artful pullings and astute twistings, would close in again upon her whom he painfully and sorrowfully regarded as the true culprit. But now, that second random question thrown out by the barrister, that query which suggested the possibility of another woman having committed the foul deed, produced a sudden and most exciting revulsion in the ideas of the Honourable Arthur Eaton; and he was led to reflect, all in a moment, that it was indeed possible, nay, even probable, that Rose was innocent and that some other female was the assassin. But that other female, who could she be? The answer was readily suggested by a crowd of past circumstances to the young gentleman's imagination; and he saw in a moment that if Rose were not really the murderess, then Fernanda must be.

Quick as a flight of birds sweeps through the ambient air did this train of reflections traverse the mind of Arthur Eaton; and therefore was it that he pressed his hand to his

throbbing brows, therefore was it that for nearly a minute he remained absorbed in profound and painful thought.

"You heard my last question, sir," observed Mr. Counsellor Sharply, who soon grew impatient; "may I request an answer to it? Or shall I repeat it for your behoof? It was whether the deceased William Dudley was known to be connected with any woman in whose breast he might have inspired feelings of a nature calculated to prompt her to the commission of this black crime."

Eaton was about to reveal everything, when it struck him that were he to tear away the veil which covered the past he would be devoting the name of Dudley to infamy and execration, and he would likewise be denouncing Fernanda to the whole world for crimes which he had forgiven, merely because he now suspected her of a new iniquity of which she might prove to be totally guiltless. And if thus denounced, she would be arrested at once, and he must appear against her, and, condemned as a prisoner, she would inevitably perish on the scaffold. Thus even if she should be proved innocent in respect to Dudley's death, the revelation of the reasons which led him to suspect her of that crime would send her all the same to the gibbet; and this was what Eaton would not have happen for worlds. No, because he had seduced her, he had injured her cruelly at the beginning, he had goaded her, as it were, to desperation; because, also, he had pardoned her for what she had done to him, and she was now settled honourably and respectably in the world. These were the reasons wherefore he did not seek, and could never desire, to punish her for the past; and unless he were well assured that she was indeed guilty of a new crime, and this crime of the blackest dye, he would not take any measure that might tend to compromise her. Thus at the very instant when, in reply to Counsellor Sharply's reiterated question, he was about to reveal all those strange and terrible circumstances with which the reader is so well acquainted, a second thought sealed his lips; and he resolved to pause ere he adopted any step, which, if rashly and inconsiderately taken, might involve an unjust accusation against Fernanda for the present, but ruin her beyond all possibility of redemption for the past.

His continued silence, and the effect produced upon his countenance and manner by the conflicting feelings and

bewildering thoughts which had thus swayed him from the moment when Counsellor Sharply first put the question above alluded to, all tended to prejudice him sorely in the eyes of the magistrate and strengthen the suspicions which every one present had already entertained against him.

"Well, I see that I must not hope for any satisfactory replies from this gentleman," said the barrister. "But I will yet ask him one more question," he continued, in a sinister tone; "and that is, how it was likely to happen that William Dudley was murdered with his own knife?"

"With his own knife!" repeated Arthur Eaton, in an amazement which was truly most unfeigned, but which was easily mistaken for the sudden excitement and alarm attendant on the discovery of an incident associated with conscious guilt.

"Yes, with his own knife," reiterated Counsellor Sharply. "May I request your worship to produce and inspect the weapon?"

And while the magistrate was complying with this demand, a silence so breathless pervaded the court that a pin might have been heard to drop. And Rose Foster could hear the palpitations of her own heart as it beat violently and rapidly in the virgin bosom that remained upheaved and motionless with a profound suspense.

"I observe upon the handle of this knife," at length said the magistrate, "the initials W. D."

A murmur of surprise, mingled with the profoundest interest, passed through the court; and nearly all eyes were instantaneously turned upon Rose Foster, as much as to assure her that she would soon be proved innocent. Then those looks were in another moment all centred on Arthur Eaton, who was so amazed by this new incident that he felt as if he were floundering in the mazes of a troubled dream where horror, peril, and wonder were all confusedly blended.

For the inference to be deduced from the circumstance respecting the knife was too clear not to strike him, as well as everybody present. It seemed to show that inasmuch as Dudley was proved by the surgeon to have been murdered, and had not committed suicide, it could only have been some one closely connected with him, or living in the same house, who could have obtained possession of that weapon wherewith the murder was accomplished.

"Your worship will please to observe," said Mr. Counsellor Sharply, "that it was upon discovering those initials on the knife this morning that I requested the postponement of the proceedings, and that I likewise wrote upon a slip of paper the demand that Mr. Eaton should be detained until the issue of the adjourned examination. If your worship had not assented to that proposition, I should have at once applied in open court for a warrant against Mr. Eaton."

"You dare not accuse me, sir," exclaimed Arthur, his cheeks flushing with indignation. "I am innocent, nay, I am incapable, utterly incapable of such a crime."

"And I also am innocent," exclaimed Rose, clasping her hands and bursting into tears, for now that she saw the turn the proceedings were so rapidly taking, her emotions of joy for herself and sorrow for Arthur Eaton swelled into a tide that broke down the barrier of her fortitude and found its vent in a flood of copious weeping.

"Compose yourself, my dear child, compose yourself," said a familiar voice; and, raising her head abruptly, Rose found that Mrs. Brace was by her side in the dock.

At this moment Mr. Peter Grumley and his man Mobbs entered the court; and going straight up to Counsellor Sharply, they whispered earnestly with that learned gentleman for a few minutes.

"A presentiment tells me that you will not be many more minutes here," said the milliner, in a low tone of touching tenderness admirably assumed.

Rose cast a glance of deep gratitude upon Mrs. Brace for that assurance; and the milliner, unprincipled and profligate as she was, felt a pang of remorse pass poignantly through her bosom as she remembered all the persecution, misery, and suffering which the poor orphan had experienced at her hands.

"Has anything new transpired?" demanded the magistrate, addressing himself to Mr. Counsellor Sharply, who had just desisted from whispering to the two police constables.

"Yes, your worship, and something of the highest importance," responded the learned gentleman.

Once more did a breathless silence and a sensation of painful suspense pervade the court.

"Proceed with your evidence, Mr. Sharply," said the magistrate.

"I call Peter Grumley to the witness-box," exclaimed the barrister, the expression of whose countenance was most mysteriously knowing.

And Mr. Grumley, having entered the box, was duly sworn to the effect that the evidence he was about to give to the court should be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help him God.

When this ceremony was accomplished, a stillness deep as that which follows a terrific rolling of thunder once more reigned in the police office; and inasmuch as the gentlemen of the long robe are amazingly fond of those proceedings the phases of which produce grand effects, Mr. Counsellor Sharply suffered at least a minute to elapse ere he chose to disturb a silence which in reality was characterized by an awe-inspiring solemnity.

At length he drew his gown over his shoulders, and, addressing Peter Grumley, said, "I believe you have been somewhere during the interval of the adjournment which just now took place?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "Leastways me and my man Mobbs has been somevheres."

"And whither have you been?" was the next leading question.

"To Lord Marchmont's House, in Hanover Square," answered Grumley.

"What did you do there?"

"I searched the room which used to be occupied by the deceased William Dudley, and also the chamber belonging to the Honourable Mr. Eaton."

"But I believe you found nothing of any consequence in the former apartment?" said Mr. Sharply.

"No, sir, nothing," was the response.

"And in the latter, that is to say, the bedchamber occupied by the Honourable Mr. Eaton —"

"I found something there, in a chest of drawers —"

"Well, what was it?" demanded Counsellor Sharply.

"This blade of a knife," returned Grumley, producing the object mentioned.

The usher took it and handed it up to the magistrate, who immediately applied it to the knife which lay before

him. It fitted exactly, and was evidently the blade which had been broken off from that knife.

A murmur of astonishment and horror ran through the court; for now that circumstantial evidence pointed to Arthur Eaton as being beyond all possibility of doubt the murderer of William Dudley, the more subdued feelings that were previously attendant on the mere suspicion, became enhanced into a boundless wonder and an immense abhorrence, — wonder that such an ingenuous-looking young man could be so great a criminal, and abhorrence not only at the deed itself, but at the base attempt which had apparently been made to shift the burden and the responsibility of the guilt upon the shoulders of an innocent young girl.

"You are safe, my dear child," whispered the milliner, with a triumphant accent, in the ears of Rose Foster.

"God be thanked!" murmured the orphan, clasping her hands fervently. "But that gentleman — Oh, that such wickedness should exist in the human heart — "

"Hush!" whispered Mrs. Brace; "he is going to speak."

"Your worship will be pleased to hear me for a few moments," said Arthur Eaton, now recovering the faculty of speech which he had lost for nearly a minute when the last overwhelming incident had completed the chain of circumstantial evidence against him.

"I should certainly advise you to reserve your defence, Mr. Eaton," observed the magistrate, with an ominous significance.

"My defence!" ejaculated the young gentleman. "What am I to understand by those words?" he demanded, with mingled hauteur and indignation.

"I will explain myself more fully, sir," said the magistrate, in a stern tone and in a severe manner. "But in the first place, with regard to the young person still standing in the dock, I must declare that the evidence against her has not only totally failed, but that she is entitled to the deepest sympathy for having even for a moment been compelled to endure the anxiety, torture, and ignominy of a position in which she never ought to have been placed."

These words were greeted with an outburst of applause on the part of the spectators; while Rose, overcome by her feelings, fell weeping and sobbing convulsively into the arms of Mrs. Brace.

" I therefore," continued the magistrate, " have unfeigned pleasure in directing Miss Foster to leave the dock; and I assure her that in thus pronouncing her discharge, not a shadow of suspicion remains in my mind concerning her."

" No one is more delighted than myself at this acquittal of the young lady," exclaimed Arthur Eaton, with a generous frankness of manner which of course passed as the rankest and vilest hypocrisy with all present; then, haughtily indifferent to the sneers which curled the lips of those countenances that met his eyes, he added, " And I heartily beg Miss Foster's forgiveness for having in any way been instrumental in causing her the inconvenience, anxiety, and annoyance which she must have suffered."

But Rose heard him not; for, so overcome was she by her own feelings on finding her innocence so fully proven and hearing it so unequivocally proclaimed, that Mrs. Brace was compelled to lead her out of the court into that private room where their former interview of this memorable day had taken place.

" Silence! " exclaimed the usher, the moment the door had closed behind the orphan girl and the milliner.

Arthur Eaton, who had been about to address the magistrate when this summons was made, folded his arms and remained silent; but the air of conscious innocence which he wore was interpreted by the spectators as the hardihood of a desperate criminality aided by a consummate hypocrisy.

" I must now recapitulate," said the magistrate, " certain points in the evidence which has been adduced in this case. In the first instance, Mr. Eaton declared that at the moment when Dudley fell he rushed forward and caught a glimpse of a lady in black darting into a passage opposite. Now this was a passage running due north; and it was completely on the southern side of the building that Miss Foster was immediately afterward captured. The next fact which I must notice is that the deceased was evidently murdered by means of a knife belonging to himself, and of which no stranger was likely to obtain possession. But then comes a still more grave, important, and serious circumstance: for the very blade which belonged to this knife and which was broken off is found in Mr. Eaton's apartment. With such evidence before me, I have only one course to adopt, which is to declare that you, Arthur Eaton, do stand com-

mitted to his Majesty's prison of Newgate to take your trial at the ensuing Sessions, on the charge of murder."

"I can only say to your worship," spoke Eaton, in a firm and resolute voice, "that I am innocent of this foul deed which is imputed to me, — as innocent as I now firmly believe that young girl to be whom you have just discharged from the dock. That a tremendous mass of circumstantial evidence has accumulated against me, I readily admit; but there is a key to the reading of this terrible mystery, a clue to the unravelling of this skein of incidents, at present so tangled and so complicated. That is, however, my secret for the present; useless and unavailing were it to enter upon any explanations at this moment or in this place. No, for a more solemn occasion and a higher tribunal shall be reserved a narrative the details of which will cause every heart to thrill with horror throughout the land, and turn into sympathy and commiseration the loathing and abhorrence which in the meantime may attach unto me. I have now no more to say; your worship has resolved upon committing me for trial, and I am forced to bow to that decision."

Having thus spoken in a firm and manly tone, the Honourable Arthur Eaton resigned himself to the constables who stood ready to lead him away from the police office; and as he traversed the crowd which opened to afford him and the officers room to pass, he was astonished to perceive that those looks which had so recently surveyed him with horror and aversion now contemplated him with a mournful interest and a sorrowful compassion.

"They are already convinced of my innocence," he thought within himself; and, his eyes filling with tears, he threw glances of mute but eloquent gratitude around him.

"Poor fellow!" whispered one individual to another.

"Yes, it is as you say," was the response given by the person thus addressed. "He is decidedly mad."

"A monomaniac."

"And his mania is murder."

These remarks, rapidly exchanged in a low tone, were by no means intended to be overheard by the Honourable Arthur Eaton; they nevertheless met his ears, and, striking with an almost overwhelming violence upon his brain, they

produced a shock which made him reel and stagger as if he were about to fall.

But the constables sustained him with their vigorous arms; and as they hurried him out of the office, the last words that fell upon his ears were, " Poor fellow! he is a monomaniac."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PRIVATE ROOM AT THE POLICE OFFICE

It was some short time before Rose Foster could so far recover her mental composure as to say to herself, "I must now think of what course I ought to adopt." But when she did thus speak with the silent voice of her own soul, she threw her eyes with an instinctive shuddering upon Mrs. Brace, who was seated alone with her in the private room adjoining the public office.

For the young orphan was suddenly reminded by all the reminiscences which swept through her brain that she was more or less indebted to the milliner for the speedy acquittal which had been brought about; and she trembled lest Mrs. Brace, forgetful of the promises made when they were previously alone together in that room, should propose to take her back again home to Pall Mall.

Mrs. Brace perceived the half-terrified, half-appealing look which the orphan had thrown upon her; and she was about to answer in words that glance which spoke so eloquently in its mute significance, when the door opened and Mr. Grumley entered the room.

"Well, ma'am," he exclaimed, in a hoarse bassoon voice, "the young lady has got off, you see. Miss Foster," he continued, "I congratulate you on the result."

"I thank you most cordially for all the sympathy you have shown and the assistance you have afforded me," said Rose, in a tone of fervent gratitude. "But what has been decided in respect to Mr. Eaton?"

"Committed for trial," responded Grumley, in a laconic manner.

"And is it possible that he can be guilty?" exclaimed Rose.

" Can't say," returned the wary constable. " Don't wentur' an opinion, miss, when things seems so wery orkard. You're safe out on it, and that's enough for the present."

Rose was about to make some additional remark when a knock was heard at the door, and Mr. Grumley hastened to answer the summons.

" A gentleman wants to speak to Miss Foster," said Mobbs, who appeared in the passage outside.

" A gentleman — to speak to me! " exclaimed the orphan, overhearing the announcement; then, instantly reflecting that it might be Meagles, of whose treatment at the hands of the government she was totally ignorant, she said, hastily, " I will receive him here, in the presence of — "

And she stopped short as she glanced toward Mrs. Brace; for it suddenly struck her that it was in the milliner's house that Meagles had appeared to deliver her, and he would doubtless be alike astonished and indignant to observe that she was on friendly terms with the woman who had persecuted her.

But all her uneasiness on this point was dissipated in a moment; for instead of beholding Meagles enter the room, as she had expected, she instantly recognized that same tall, thin, pale, but very handsome and interesting young man in whose company she had found herself for a few minutes on a certain occasion, in the waiting-room of the Earl of Desborough's mansion.

Advancing with evident timidity toward Rose, the young man took off his hat, bowed gracefully, and said, " You doubtless have forgotten me, Miss Foster; indeed, I cannot possibly suppose that you remember to have ever met me before — "

And he stopped short, for he perceived the looks of Mrs. Brace fixed angrily and suspiciously upon him. Indeed, this lady recollected perfectly well having seen him before; but where or under what circumstances she could not, for the life of her, call to mind.

As for Mr. Grumley, not being interested in the present scene, he walked to the window, whistling one of the tunes to which he had sung a bacchanalian song at the free-and-easy where he had passed the greater portion of the previous night.

" It would be a ridiculous affectation on my part, sir,"

observed Rose, in reply to the young gentleman's remarks, "were I to declare that I do not remember you."

"Then you recollect that we have met before?" exclaimed the stranger, a perceptible gleam of satisfaction lighting up his pale countenance.

"Yes, for a few minutes, at the Earl of Desborough's," responded Rose; and Mrs. Brace, overhearing what was said, instantly called to mind the fact that it was so.

"Curiosity led me into the court a few minutes ago," continued the young man; "for as I was passing through the street I heard the observations which certain loungers at the door were making upon the proceedings within. I accordingly entered, little suspecting that the young lady of whom the people outside were talking was known even by sight to me. With difficulty I forced my way through the crowd; and at the same moment that I succeeded in obtaining admission to the court, you were leaving it in company with that lady," and the stranger glanced toward Mrs. Brace. "I recognized you instantaneously," he continued, fixing his eyes upon Rose with an expression of tender interest and respectful admiration. "Oh, yes, I knew you again immediately, for since I saw you that day at the Earl of Desborough's, I have thought of you often, very often."

The countenance of the young maiden became suddenly suffused with a deep blush as these words fell upon her ear; and she glanced timidly toward Mrs. Brace to ascertain whether she had overheard that delicate compliment, for such indeed it was, and uttered, too, in a tone so fervid and sincere, but accompanied with a manner so profoundly respectful and timidly deprecating, that even the pure-minded, innocent, and artless Rose Foster could not possibly take offence.

But at the very moment when the maiden thus threw her rapid glance toward Mrs. Brace, Mr. Grumley, turning away from the window, accosted that lady, saying, "P'raps it would be as well, ma'am, if you and me was to have a few minutes' talk together, seeing as how that I must be off almost directly."

Mrs. Brace accordingly rose from the seat which she had occupied near the fire, and hastened to converse apart with Mr. Grumley in the window recess.

"You may conceive, Miss Foster," now resumed the

stranger, drawing nearer to her and speaking in a lower tone than at first, "how surprised, how shocked, how pained I was to behold in you the heroine of this day's sad proceedings. But, no, you cannot conceive what my feelings were, because you are ignorant how deep was the impression you made upon me during the few minutes that we conversed together at Desborough House."

Rose started, surveyed the young man with astonishment for a few moments, and then, casting down her eyes, blushed deeply.

"Oh, do not be offended with me," he said, in so earnest, sincere, and appealing a tone that no measure of resentment could have withstood it. "I would sooner die than cause you pain, for God knows you have this day endured enough. But I was telling you how shocked I was ere now to recognize in the accused Rose Foster that same young lady whose image has ever been present in my memory since first we met at the earl's mansion in Berkeley Square; but that first feeling of anguish on your account was almost instantaneously relieved by the intelligence that you were discharged, and then a burning joy filled my soul when I heard that your innocence had been made manifest beyond all possibility of doubt. Yes, oh, yes, I wept tears of ecstasy and bliss at the issue of that painful ordeal through which you have passed; and I overheard persons near me saying, 'He is perhaps the young lady's brother.' 'No,' replied some one better informed than they; 'Miss Foster is not only an orphan, but has neither brother nor sister, nor any near relation.' Then I thought how happy I should be if I were your brother; for I also am an orphan, and without a single relative in the whole wide world," added the young man, mournfully.

There was something in this announcement which touched the tenderest chord in the heart of Rose Foster; and, raising her eyes, she surveyed the stranger with a look of benevolent feeling and compassionate interest. That avowal which he had just made seemed to establish, as it were, a secret affinity between them; the identity of their orphan positions in the world appeared to place them all in a moment on a footing of friendliness. The barrier of cold reserve was suddenly removed; the diffidence of strangers was annihilated. Those words, "For I also am an orphan,"

were a better, oh, far better introduction on the part of that pale but handsome young man to the poor but lovely maiden than if a duke or a duchess had presented him to her with all the usual forms and ceremonies, hollow words and meaningless obeisances.

" Yes, I thought how happy I should be, were I really able to step forward and claim you as a sister," continued the young man, encouraged by the look of tender interest which Rose had cast upon him; " and while this idea was yet oscillating in my mind, I overheard the same person who had last spoken say, ' Yes, poor girl! she lost her parents under the cruellest circumstances; for I was living next door to them at the time.' Then this individual began to narrate some distressing tale to those near him; while I, unable to restrain my feelings any longer, determined to present myself to you, offer you my congratulations on the triumphant issue of this day's proceedings, and beseech you, Miss Foster, to regard me henceforth as a friend."

These last words were uttered in a low, tremulous tone, and with a certain hesitation of manner; for the stranger was evidently fearful of giving offence to that maiden, whose mind he felt convinced was as pure as her person was beautiful.

" I am deeply, deeply grateful to you for the kind interest which you have shown in my behalf," said Miss Foster, her own voice trembling with emotions profoundly stirred. " But since you are acquainted with my name, permit me to inquire that of one whose friendly conduct of this evening will never be effaced from my memory."

" My name is George Woodfall," was the response, " and I am by profession an artist. But let us now speak of yourself, Miss Foster, for I am determined to act as your friend; and if the identity of orphanage do not give me this right and even impose this duty, then human nature has no ties and society no sympathies beyond mere conventionalities and empty, hollow flatteries. Tell me, then, Miss Foster, tell me whether you have kind friends to take care of you, a happy home to receive you."

" Home! the orphan's home! " murmured the young maiden, her bosom heaving with a profound sigh, approaching almost to a subdued sob, at the same time.

" Oh, then I may yet be enabled to serve you, Miss

Foster," exclaimed George Woodfall, with impassioned ardour alike in his tone and manner; " and I beseech, I implore, I entreat you to look upon me as a friend who would lay down his life to save you a single pang."

" Mr. Woodfall," said Rose, wiping away the tears which had started forth upon her long lashes at the mention of the word " home," — and now, as she fixed her sweet blue eyes upon the young artist's countenance, there was something so melting in their expression and so softly touching in her whole aspect that he felt as if he had known and loved her from their very infancy, — " Mr. Woodfall," she said, " I am totally unable to find words to convey an idea of all the gratitude I feel for this most generous, unexpected, and disinterested behaviour on your part. As candidly as you have spoken to me, so frankly will I answer you; and my answer is," she added, her voice sinking to a low and tremulous whisper, " that I have no friends to take care of me, no home to receive me."

" But that lady? " said Woodfall, casting his eyes toward Mrs. Brace, who was in deep conference with Grumley in the window recess.

" That is Mrs. Brace, the milliner," responded the orphan, again wiping away the tears from her eyes. " I was in her service, but certain circumstances, which I cannot now mention — in fine, I will not return to her establishment."

And she looked shudderingly toward the milliner; for although she had forgiven that woman, although she believed her to be penitent for the past, and although she felt grateful to her for the manner in which she had behaved relative to the proceedings which had just terminated, the young girl nevertheless recoiled from the idea of venturing back again into a house where she had already endured so much, and where she would again be exposed to the persecutions of the Prince of Wales.

" Miss Foster," said George Woodfall, suddenly breaking a silence which had lasted for upwards of a minute, and he looked the maiden full in the face as he spoke, " Miss Foster, can you, will you, dare you trust me? Or is your experience of the world of too bitter a nature to permit you to put any confidence in a stranger? "

" Mr. Woodfall," replied the young girl, firmly, " not for an instant will I return your generosity by the ingratitude

of even leaving you in a state of uncertainty respecting the sentiments with which you have inspired me. Those sentiments are the most implicit confidence in the nobility of your character and the fullest reliance upon your honour. For are we not both orphans?" she demanded, in a tone of the most touching pathos; "and do we not know too well how sorrowful is the lot of orphanage to have the heart to aggravate that woe or enhance that affliction?"

"God forbid that I should be capable of such iniquity!" exclaimed Woodfall, fervently. "You have declared that you can place confidence in me, and I thank you. You have said that you will put reliance upon me, and you shall receive at my hands the respect, the attention, and the protection with which a brother would surround a well-beloved and cherished sister. Know, then, my dear Miss Foster," he continued, "that though a humble artist, I have recently made several friends in the sphere of aristocracy and fashion. Thanks to the patronage of the Earl of Desborough and his amiable countess, the introductions I have received to some noble families open to me the most brilliant prospects," and as Woodfall thus spoke, the warm glow of high aspirations appeared upon his cheeks and poured a flood of light into his intelligent eyes. "But amongst the introductions which I have obtained through the interest of Lord and Lady Desborough," he proceeded, after a few moments' pause, "none has given me greater pleasure than that which has rendered me acquainted with the Marchioness of Bellenden. Have you ever heard of that excellent, generous-hearted, and amiable lady?"

"Yes," replied Rose Foster; "her mansion, which is called the priory, is in the Edgeware Road, at no great distance from the house which I was once enabled to call my home."

"You have heard, then, of the Marchioness of Bellenden," said Woodfall; "and you are therefore well acquainted with the admirable reputation which she bears?"

"My father and mother were wont to speak of her as a lady who did honour to that aristocratic sphere to which she belonged," said Rose, "instead of deriving any honour therefrom."

"And your parents rightly estimated her character," ex-

claimed Woodfall. "Would you, then, accept a home at Bellenden Priory?"

The maiden gave no immediate answer; but she fixed her eyes upon the artist with a mingled expression of reproach and doubt, as if to intimate that it would be cruel of him to trifle with her feelings, and yet that she could scarcely believe him to be capable of such ungenerous conduct.

"Miss Foster, I am serious," he hastened to observe. "Do not wrong me by a suspicion."

"Oh, pardon me, Mr. Woodfall," she exclaimed; "but I feared lest in your anxiety to serve me, you might be overrating your ability, or at least that you fancied others to possess hearts as good and generous as your own, and as willing to afford the friendless orphan a home — "

"The Marchioness of Bellenden will receive you with open arms," interrupted Woodfall, with the solemn seriousness of one who was confident in the assertion he was making. "Your misfortunes will endear you to her; and, moreover, even before I knew your name, which I only learned ere now, I have spoken of you to her ladyship."

"Spoken of me!" exclaimed the orphan, once more throwing upon the artist a look which, if not actually laden with suspicion, was at least mistrustful enough to give him pain.

"Oh, now you doubt me again," he murmured, in a tone of mingled reproach and vexation. "But it is natural; I am a stranger — "

"Once more I beseech you to pardon me," said Rose; and yielding to the impulse of that ingenuous fervour which made her feel that she was but ill-requiting the young man for all his kindness and disinterested attention toward her, she extended her hand, observing, "I was wrong to doubt you, even for a moment; and indeed it was not doubt, but rather amazement and wonder — "

"That I should have ever mentioned you to the marchioness?" exclaimed Woodfall, taking the fair hand of the orphan and pressing it gently in his own. "But have I not already told you that your image has dwelt in my memory since the moment when we first met at the house of Lord Desborough in Berkeley Square? Is it surprising, then, that I should have spoken of you as the fair unknown to a lady who condescends to express an interest in my welfare?"

"Mr. Woodfall," said Rose, casting down her eyes and withdrawing the hand which she had abstractedly suffered to linger in his own for a few moments, "I know not how I could have merited the good opinion which you so generously formed of me — "

"We will not talk upon that subject for the present," interrupted the artist, in a gentle tone. "Time is wearing on; it is already six o'clock," he added, consulting his watch, which was a gift from Lord Desborough, "and you must be anxious to depart from a place which is not calculated to excite the most pleasurable reminiscences."

Rose Foster gave not an immediate reply; but, pressing her hand to her brow, she mentally took a rapid survey of her position. To return to Mrs. Brace's establishment was not to be thought of; to receive money from her was to accept a boon which would give that woman a species of right to visit her at any lodging where she might settle herself. Such a proceeding suited not the views of the orphan, who was anxious to withdraw herself entirely from that channel of existence into which she had blindly and unadvisedly launched herself in the first instance, and which had so nearly hurried her on to destruction. But Meagles and Melmoth — what of them? Were they forgotten by the young girl? No, oh, no; but the former was an unmarried man, at whose hands she could not directly seek protection; and not for a minute would she think of again becoming a burden to the latter. For be it remembered that she was totally unaware of all that had happened to both of them.

What, then, did the orphan decide upon? Not to return to Mrs. Brace's establishment, nor to receive any succour, pecuniary, or otherwise, at her hands. No, nor yet to appeal to Meagles, nor fly for refuge to the poor working man. But she resolved upon trusting to George Woodfall, this new friend whom Providence appeared to have sent her at the moment of a cruelly embarrassing extremity. For the alternative with the poor maiden was to procure a home, an asylum where she would enjoy personal security and mental peace. And this home, was it not now offered to her?

"Miss Foster, you appear to hesitate, you are undecided?" said the artist. "My God! do you still doubt me? Oh, if I did not entertain a true, sincere, and holy interest in your welfare, this utter want of confidence on your part

would prompt me to bid you a sorrowful farewell and retire."

"How often am I destined thus to wound your generous feelings by that semblance of suspicion which my manner so unfortunately assumes?" exclaimed Rose, once more proffering her hand, which the artist took with a joy that he could not conceal; but this joy was mingled with so profound a respect that so far from shocking even the most delicate sensibility, it could only serve as a proof of his honest sincerity.

"Then you accept the proposal which I have made you, Miss Foster?" he said.

"Alas! I have no alternative, poor orphan that I am!" she murmuringly answered, her eyes filling with tears.

"The Marchioness of Bellenden will welcome you as cordially and as warmly as if you were a sister or a daughter," rejoined Woodfall. "And now, if you will say farewell to Mrs. Brace —"

"One word," ejaculated Rose Foster, in a low but hurried whisper, as she glanced almost in affright toward the milliner, who was still conversing with Grumley in the window recess; "I do not wish Mrs. Brace to know whither I am going. This may appear singular to you; but on a future occasion, when we are better acquainted, I will explain my reasons —"

"Never shall I seek to penetrate further into your confidence than you may be willing to admit me," interrupted George Woodfall. "The friendship which I proffer you claims no rights, asserts no privileges, imposes no conditions. It is the friendship, the love, the affection which a brother may offer to a sister."

"And as such do I accept and reciprocate it," answered Rose, profoundly touched by the sense of all that was noble, generous, delicate, and considerate in the language, manner, and conduct of the young artist.

CHAPTER XXIV

MRS. BRACE AND MR. PETER GRUMLEY

THE room in which the preceding dialogue had taken place was large though not lofty; and thus, while Rose Foster and George Woodfall were discoursing near the fireplace, nothing that passed between them was overheard by the milliner and the head constable, who were holding their conference in the window recess.

And now let us see what were the topics of conversation with this latter couple.

"Well, ma'am," observed Mr. Grumley, in a low and confidential tone, as Mrs. Brace accompanied him apart into the window recess, "I suppose you ain't wery sorry that the present business has come off so well."

"On the contrary," returned the milliner, "I can scarcely restrain my joy. You certainly managed the affair excellently — "

"Indeed, ma'am," interrupted Mr. Peter Grumley, "there was no management in the matter at all. The thing took its regular course, and there was no necessity for me to make use of any artifice or stratagem whatsomever."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Mrs. Brace, surveying the head constable with the most unaffected astonishment. "The inculpation of Arthur Eaton — "

"Was brought about by the natural course of events, ma'am," rejoined the officer. "Everything went on as smooth as possible; and justice received nothing more than the ordinary amount of help, and certainly not the slightest shadow of hindrance."

"I am totally at a loss what to think or how to understand you, Mr. Grumley," said the milliner. "In the first place, did you not contrive the little incident of the discovery of the

blade of the knife in Mr. Eaton's own apartment at his father's mansion? Did you not contrive this incident, I ask, for the purpose of procuring Miss Foster's immediate acquittal? "

" No such a thing, ma'am! " exclaimed Grumley, with almost an expression of indignation upon his countenance. " I don't do business in that fashion, I can assure you. Besides, how do you suppose that I could procure a broken blade to fit so exactly as the one did that was produced in court just now? "

" Well, well, I perceive that you do not choose to be too communicative, Mr. Grumley," said Mrs. Brace, her arch smile displaying the fine teeth which shone like ivory betwixt the moist coral of her luscious lips. " Keep your own counsel — I shall not attempt to pry into your secrets. All that you undertake you evidently manage so well that those who employ you ought to be satisfied with the results and not seek to ascertain how those consequences have been brought about. I have not forgotten your remark that when the means do not present themselves of their own accord you invent or devise them."

" Yes, ma'am, and so does every long-headed person in this world to a certain extent," observed Grumley, softening in his manner as his libidinous eyes feasted themselves upon the milliner's full bosom, which was much exposed in consequence of the rich scarf being thrown back on account of the heat of the room. " But I see that you don't precisely understand the events of this arternoon," continued Grumley, edging closer toward Mrs. Brace and bending his tall form somewhat so as to be enabled to maintain a confidential kind of whispering in her ear. " The fact is that I was quite sure all along of Miss Foster's innocence, and I knowed that if any one could make it appear, Counsellor Sharply was the man. But I must candidly confess that at fust things seemed to go bad enough against the young lass, till a slight turn took place, when it was proved that she was running off in one direction while the lady in black which Mr. Eaton saw had fled in another. Then, you see, the suspicion instantly arose that Mr. Eaton might have invented his lady in black; and immediately afterward comes the extraordinary affair of the knife with the initials upon it. As a matter of course, Counsellor Sharply seized on them two pints; and he asked

for a remand to enable me and Mobbs to go and make a search at Lord Marchmont's house in Hanover Square. Well, I can't say that I expected to find anything important there, although such-like investigations have at times led to the most extraordinary discoveries. And such did it prove to be in this instance; for, lo and behold! in one of Mr. Eaton's drawers, just underneath his clean shirts, we found that wery blade which we produced in court."

"And do you really believe Mr. Eaton to be the murderer?" demanded Mrs. Brace, fixing her eyes keenly upon the constable's countenance.

"Well, I'm not in the habit of giving a hasty or rash opinion," said the officer, in a musing tone; "for don't you see, ma'am, it's a sort of pint of honour with us never to be mistaken in any way or out in our reckoning. If we didn't preserve the character of infallibility — that's the word, ma'am — we should lose all the confidence that's placed in us. So, you perceive, it don't suit us to wentur' an opinion until we're sure that it's the right one. At the same time, I don't mind whispering to you, ma'am, for you're such a wery nice lady, that you could wheedle me out of anything."

"I am really gratified by the compliment, Mr. Grumley," exclaimed Mrs. Brace, laughing. "But you were about to give me your opinion in a confidential manner?" she added, interrogatively.

"And my opinion is, ma'am," rejoined the officer, "that Mr. Eaton will find it precious difficult to convince a jury that he is innocent. But he won't be hung, ma'am, — he won't be hung," added Grumley, looking as solemnly mysterious as a drunken parson trying to seem sober while preaching his sermon; "for this is what will get him off, ma'am, this is what will get him off," and the constable tapped his forehead significantly.

"Ah, I understand you," said Mrs. Brace, really experiencing some degree of interest in this portion of the conversation; for she had not failed to observe, while in court, that Mr. Eaton was a very handsome and prepossessing young man. "He is not to be held accountable for his actions?" she added, inquiringly.

"Just so," responded Grumley.

"And therefore," continued Mrs. Brace, "your opinion is that he committed the murder in a fit of monomania, or, at

all events, while labouring under some aberration of the intellect."

"Well, I suppose that's about the long and short of the matter," said the constable. "You now understand, ma'am, at all events, that the discovery of the blade of the knife was as regular and straightfor'ard a transaction on the part of me and Mobbs as such a thing could possibly be. The truth is that although I'd go a great way to get a person off, no matter whether innocent or guilty, yet I wouldn't for the world play any tricks to shove the load of guilt on to the shoulders that ought not to bear it. In Miss Foster's case, I let things take their natural course, so that I might see what would turn up; and if circumstantial evidence had borne her down altogether, then I should have began to consider how I was to save her. But as her innocence transpired in the regular way, I was not called upon to step out of the usual path. So much for that case; but with respect to t'other."

"Caroline Walters, you mean?" exclaimed Mrs. Brace; then, as a sudden gloom spread over her countenance, she observed, "I cannot, for the life of me, comprehend how you hope to save that unfortunate girl."

"Haven't I promised that she should be saved?" demanded Grumley, in that tone of dogged confidence which men of his class and stamp are so apt to assume when they are impressed with the conviction of their ability to achieve a particular end.

"You have promised, certainly," returned Mrs. Brace; "but —"

"And isn't there another five hundred guineas to be paid over to me, if I succeed?" exclaimed the constable.

"Yes, and the sum shall be forthcoming with as much pleasure as promptitude on my part," rejoined the milliner.

"Then don't be under any apprehension, ma'am," said Grumley. "What I have undertaken to do, I shall perform; and you'll have to pay me over the five hundred yaller boys to-morrow night. But I give you due warning that the evidence is so strong against Caroline Walters, it will be impossible to get her off by fair means."

"I care not how the affair is managed, so that she be rescued from the grasp of justice," exclaimed the milliner. "But why did not her case come on to-day before the Lambeth justices of peace?"

" Because I had the investigation of the affair put into my hands," answered Grumley; " and in consequence of the understanding which was come to with me at Carlton House this morning, I immediately sent one of my underlings over to the Lambeth authorities to let 'em know that Caroline Walters mustn't be brought up till to-morrow, as I expected to have the case completely made out against her by that time."

" Then you have taken an ostensibly hostile attitude toward her? " exclaimed Mrs. Brace.

" How the devil could I do otherwise? " demanded Mr. Grumley. " Ain't I the head officer of Bow Street? And must not people in authority maintain at least a show of consistency and propriety? But don't be alarmed, everything will go on as it ought to do, and the lass shall escape to-morrow evening as sure as I'm standing here."

" And you will give her fifty guineas and tell her to get out of the country as soon as possible," said Mrs. Brace.

" I'll not only give her the money, but also a safe disguise into the bargain," returned the constable. " Lord bless ye, ma'am, I never do things by halves! But what are you going to do with that sweet young gal there? " inquired Mr. Grumley, glancing over his shoulder in the direction of Rose Foster, who was in earnest and whispering discourse with George Woodfall.

" I shall keep my promise and let her go whithersoever she chooses," responded the milliner, who was by no means inclined to run any more risks of exposure and ruin by assisting the designs of the Prince of Wales in respect to the lovely orphan.

" That young chap seems to be getting precious tender toward her," whispered Grumley, again glancing over his shoulder and observing the respectful admiration and soft solicitude with which George Woodfall was contemplating Rose Foster. " P'raps he's making her a hoffer of marriage."

" I wish to Heaven he was," rejoined Mrs. Brace. " He would then take her so completely off my hands that I should not be compelled to furnish her with any of my own hard-earned gold to set her afloat in the world."

" Well, ma'am, I shall say good-bye to you now," observed Mr. Peter Grumley, " and if you'll be at home — and alone— to-morrow night between ten and eleven o'clock, I shall take

the liberty of dropping in to bring you the news about Miss Caroline Walters."

"And receive your remaining five hundred guineas," added Mrs. Brace, with a smile. "You will be welcome, I can assure you."

Mr. Grumley threw upon the milliner a look which seemed to say that she was a very desirable person and had considerably inflamed his passions during the quarter of an hour's chat in the window recess; and Mrs. Brace, penetrating what was passing in his mind, laughed in a low but merry manner at the idea of having captivated the huge, ugly, revolting, shabby-looking fellow who thus dared to regard her with such a libidinous grossness.

Had he been a handsome, dashing young nobleman, with yellow kid gloves and a scented cambric handkerchief, Mrs. Brace would have responded to his lustful glances with looks of piquant archness and voluptuous encouragement; but the sensitiveness of the fashionable milliner could only treat with a good-humoured ridicule the amorous pretensions of one whom she dared not offend by showing herself outraged and shocked at his conduct.

Heaving a profound sigh, Mr. Peter Grumley made a low bow to Mrs. Brace, and stalked out of the room; and the noise of the door closing behind him aroused George Woodfall and Rose Foster from the deep interest of the *tête-à-tête* which had at this moment reached the point specified at the close of the preceding chapter.

"Well, my dear child," said Mrs. Brace, accosting the young orphan with an appearance of so much maternal affability and kindness that George Woodfall could not help wondering at the extreme repugnance which Rose had demonstrated at the idea of returning into the milliner's establishment, "what course have you determined to adopt? And in what manner can I be serviceable to you?"

"This gentleman," said Rose, indicating the artist with a glance, and speaking in a tone of modest decision and maidenly firmness which at once convinced the milliner that some definite plan had been already resolved upon by the orphan girl, even if it were not actually arranged in concert with the young man who stood beside her, "this gentleman," she said, "is Mr. Woodfall, and through his kind, benevolent,

and compassionate aid I expect to find a home at the abode of a lady with whom he is accquainted."

"I am perfectly aware that I have not the least right to demand of you an account of your conduct," said Mrs. Brace, now feeling herself piqued, inasmuch as she saw that the orphan had purposely avoided naming the lady and mentioning the address whereunto she had alluded. "But at the same time," continued the milliner, almost immediately recovering her good humour, "I am overjoyed to hear that your prospects are so agreeable, and I wish you all possible happiness to compensate for the misery you have endured this day."

"Farewell, Mrs. Brace," said Rose, tendering her hand to the milliner. "Once more do I thank you for your kindness in this affair."

"And you will forget the past, dear Rose?" whispered Mrs. Brace, as she stooped forward and kissed her upon the cheek.

"Yes, I have promised to do so, and I will keep my word," responded the orphan.

The milliner then took her departure; and a few minutes afterward George Woodfall and Rose Foster entered a hackney-coach which had been sent for at their request.

A considerable crowd was gathered in the street to catch a glimpse of the charming girl as she came forth from the office, and loud cheers welcomed her as the artist handed her into the vehicle.

The coach drove rapidly away; the multitude dispersed; and while Rose Foster was being conducted to the mansion of the Marchioness of Bellenden, the Honourable Arthur Eaton was entering a solitary cell within the sinister-looking walls of Newgate.

CHAPTER XXV

CAROLINE WALTERS

It was about twenty minutes to one o'clock in the afternoon of the following day that a hackney-coach stopped at the gate of Horsemonger Lane Gaol and two men leaped forth.

These were Mr. Peter Grumley and his factotum Mobbs; and on entering the lobby, they were instantaneously saluted in familiar terms by the turnkey on duty.

"Come for the young 'ooman, eh?" said this functionary, when the usual compliments accompanied by a little chaffing had been exchanged.

"Yes," responded Grumley. "How has she behaved herself, old feller?"

"Silent, reserved, and obstinate," was the answer. "She's a pretty gal, — a deuced pretty gal; but there's moments when the devil looks out of her eyes. I couldn't help surweying her with attention when I went around last night to lock up; and I thought to myself, thinks I, 'Well, I'm blowed if you ain't capable of murdering anybody that stands in your path.'"

"And so she hasn't talked at all, eh?" observed Grumley, interrogatively.

"She hasn't said nothing either bad, good, or indifferent," answered the turnkey. "The matron tried to draw her out yesterday; but it was no go, I understand; and so I suppose she means to see what turn matters may take, before she opens her lips on the subject."

"Well, then, she'll soon have an opportunity of satisfying her curiosity," observed Grumley; "for she'll be committed to-day to a certainty. I've got a precious strong case against her, I can tell you."

"Oh, I s'pose there's no doubt about it," remarked the turnkey, as he opened the inner door of the lobby and ordered some underling to fetch Caroline Walters from her cell.

In a few minutes the young girl made her appearance, in the custody of the underling just alluded to; and, being transferred to the charge of Grumley and Mobbs, she accompanied the officials into the hackney-coach, which immediately drove away.

Caroline Walters was deadly pale, and, as this pallor showed through the brunette hue of her complexion, it gave a ghastly aspect to her countenance. Her fine dark eyes shone with a restless and sinister light which vibrated as a star; and her pearly teeth were clenched behind the closely compressed lips. There was an awful composure in her manner, which, when considered in respect to her looks, seemed compounded of dark menace against some one and of a fixed and desperate resolution with reference to herself.

The moment the vehicle rolled away from the gate of Horsemonger Lane Prison, Mr. Grumley drew up the window on his side, while Mobbs did the same on the other; and then the head constable addressed himself in a hasty and laconic manner to Caroline.

"Miss Walters," he said, "we have not many minutes to converse together, and we must make the most of so short a time."

"What can you have to say to me?" she demanded, raising her eyes and glancing suspiciously from the ill-looking countenance of Grumley to the repulsive features of Mobbs, for the two constables were seated opposite to her in the vehicle.

"Listen, and don't interrupt me more than you can help, miss," resumed the head officer. "Your case is a very bad one, and you're sure to be committed for trial. If committed for trial, you're sure to be found guilty and hung."

"I already perceive the weight of that circumstantial evidence which will be arrayed against me," answered Caroline, in a low and somewhat thick tone, "and I am prepared for the worst. But I shall at least have the satisfaction of giving a full and complete exposure of the iniquities of the immense brothel over which the arch-procuress Mrs. Brace presides, and which has for so many years helped to sustain the midwifery establishment in Fore Street."

These words were pronounced with a concentrated bitterness of feeling denoting the stern resolution which the young girl had adopted not to die unavenged.

" And, moreover," she added, after a brief pause, " I will proclaim in the presence of the magistrate and the whole court the name of him who seduced me so vilely and abandoned me so cruelly. Oh, I will not pass through the disgrace of the Old Bailey and the hangman, without dragging others through the mire and the filth of public exposure, infamy, and shame."

And now the sinister light which burnt in her eyes flashed forth in those rays which carry a shudder with them through the entire frame that they appear to penetrate and into the depths of the soul to which they seem to pierce.

" Miss Walters," Grumley hastened to observe, " you must renounce your present plans and alter your policy altogether."

" What do you mean? " exclaimed the young girl, now surveying the constable with ineffable amazement.

" I mean, Miss Walters, that I am your friend, and that I will save you, if you will permit me to do it," responded Grumley in a rapid tone.

" Save me! " repeated Caroline, clutching with a hysterical joy at the hope which fell thus suddenly upon her soul.

" Yes, save you from the scaffold, miss," answered Grumley. " Now listen one moment. Whether innocent or guilty, you'll find that the evidence will be overwhelming against you, and you will likewise find that it's my own self as will have got up the case so strong against you."

" Then how can you proclaim yourself my friend? " asked Caroline, bitterly.

" Because I am compelled to do my dooty as a officer in the eyes of the public," replied Grumley, meeting unflinchingly the searching look which the girl threw upon him; " whereas in private," he added, " I may befriend and serve whomsoever I choose."

" I understand you," said Caroline, her confidence returning. " But wherefore should you feel any interest in me? I am an utter stranger to you."

" True: but Mrs. Brace has enjoined me to do all I can for you."

" Mrs. Brace! " repeated Caroline, in a tone of inde-

scribable disgust. "Ah, yes, I understand, she fears exposure, and she would conciliate me. Is it not so?"

"Never mind the reasons that she may have, miss," exclaimed Grumley. "It is enow for you to know that she has took up your case wery kind indeed, and Counsellor Sharply is engaged to make a fight for you, and I'm resolved to save you, happen what will. But in order that our endeavours may be crowned with success, you must promise to do exactly what I tell you and act precisely as I shall point out."

"And will you guarantee my safety on those conditions?" demanded Caroline, eagerly, for now that a hope was once more excited on her soul, she longed — oh, how eagerly she longed — to live, not only for the sake of live itself, but also for the purposes of her darkly cherished vengeance.

"Miss Walters," said Grumley, in a firm, decisive, and almost arbitrary tone, "you must stick to the path that I am about to chalk out for you, and then I'll guarantee your safety, but not unless."

"Tell me all that I am to do," observed the young girl, "and you shall find me obedient and docile."

"In the first place," resumed Grumley, "you must not be surprised if you see my man Mobbs here get up into the witness-box and say all he possibly can against you, — because that's our wocation. Besides, it's necessary that we should appear raythor bitter against you than too kind, or else we should be suspected of doing on purpose the thing that's to happen arterward, and which mustn't seem to be through any fault of our'n."

"I do not understand you, sir," said Caroline.

"But you will before the day's over, my dear," returned Grumley; "and you will bless your stars that you ever fell in with such a good-hearted creetur' as I am. For I tell you that by nine o'clock this evening you shall be free, at large, in safety, — although things will go precious queer against you presently. But this is what you must do: When all the evidence on the side of the prosecution has been disposed of, and the magistrate asks you what you have to say why you shouldn't be committed for trial, you must at once and emphatically declare your innocence."

"And I am innocent," exclaimed Caroline, with a strange

commingling of hauteur and indignation in her tone and manner.

"That's just the way to say it before the magistrate, miss," observed Grumley, with as much coolness as if it were a mere stage rehearsal. "His worship will then ask you what proof you have to advance, and Counsellor Sharply will probably recommend you to reserve your defence, because the counsellor won't know what my after-plans are. But you must speak out boldly and say that if the magistrate will allow you to visit the house in Fore Street where the murder was committed, you will there show the constable who shall accompany you the most striking and startling proofs of your innocence. Now, can you manage to say all this with a firm and resolute air, — an air that looks like innocence, you know?"

"Assuredly I can," answered Caroline, "and the more so, inasmuch as I am innocent. Oh, my God, I am really and truly innocent, or may I perish this very moment! But proceed: what next am I to do?"

"Leave the rest to me," answered Grumley. "Only do what I have told you, and do it well, and I'll guarantee that you sha'n't sleep in a prison to-night. And what's more," added the head constable, "I am to give you fifty guineas for Mrs. Brace, which amiable lady has took a wery lively interest in your welfare. But mind, not a word about vengeance against the late Mrs. Lindley, nor Mrs. Brace, nor against your seducer. All that kind of palaver will do the cause no good, and may prevent the magistrate from granting the request which you are to make. But here we are at his worship's house."

And as Mr. Peter Grumley uttered these last words, the hackney-coach stopped.

In the times of which we are writing there was no regularly established police court on the Surrey side of the metropolis, and prisoners were accordingly taken to the dwellings of the justices of the peace residing in that district. It was therefore at the private residence of a local magistrate that the present case was to be investigated. But his worship had a large room fitted up with all the miniature conveniences similar to those which on a larger scale characterized the police office in Bow Street. And this room was crowded to excess when Caroline Walters was introduced precisely

as the clock struck one, — the hour which his worship had appointed to take the case, when all the night-charges were disposed of.

Counsellor Sharply was seated in the little pew provided for the accommodation of counsel; and he bestowed a nod of recognition upon Mr. Peter Grumley, as this official escorted Caroline Walters to the dock, the steps of which she mounted with a firmness of tread and of demeanour which produced different impressions on those present. For whereas in every assembly there is a majority of persons who are always inclined to look upon the dark and the evil side of human nature in preference to the bright and the good, so on this occasion did the larger portion of the audience immediately attribute Caroline's manner to the hardihood of a guilt which strove to assume the brazen front of innocence; while the minority of the spectators, who after all were the more humane as well as the better experienced, shook their heads mysteriously and said to themselves, "That young creature is a victim, and not a criminal!"

Rapid but searching was the glance which the prisoner threw around the court to ascertain if there were any familiar faces there; and her looks settled upon the late Mrs. Lindley's two servants, who were seated on a bench together with one of the constables that had taken Caroline into custody on the night of the murder.

And now the examination commenced by the magistrate's clerk inquiring the prisoner's name, age, and profession. To these questions she responded in a firm but respectful tone; and Counsellor Sharply then intimated that he appeared on her behalf.

Mr. Peter Grumley, who had the management of the case, now made a sign for one of the deceased midwife's servants to enter the witness-box; and this female, having been sworn, deposed as follows:

"I have been for twelve years in the service of the late Mrs. Lindley. She was a midwife, and received young ladies who wished to retire into seclusion during the period of their confinement. Miss Walters, the prisoner, became an inmate of the establishment in that manner, a few weeks ago. She was considered a young lady of very extraordinary disposition; and when she was confined, she manifested a great malignity of feeling toward Mrs. Lindley. The surgeon

who was called in to attend upon her remonstrated with her upon the irritability which she showed toward Mrs. Lindley."

Here Caroline, who had kept her eyes fixed upon the floor from the first moment that the witness began speaking, looked suddenly up and exclaimed, " Oh, if I might explain to your worship the reasons which made me hate and abhor that Mrs. Lindley — "

" You shall speak presently," interrupted the magistrate.

Caroline stopped short, and as she glanced her eyes rapidly around, ere she bent them down again, she caught the reproving look which Counsellor Sharply threw upon her, for the learned gentleman was naturally horrified at the immense damage which the prisoner had just inflicted upon her own case by the admission which she had made relative to feelings of hatred and abhorrence in respect to the deceased.

The female servant continued her deposition:

" I believe there was some quarrel or dispute between the deceased and Miss Walters the evening before the one on which the murder took place. For on that evening Mrs. Lindley locked Miss Walters up in her bedchamber; and all next day she was kept a prisoner in her room. I took up her meals, and each time when I went into the chamber I found Miss Walters very much excited, dashing her hand violently against her forehead, and muttering dark threats against Mrs. Lindley and her seducer. But she did not say who her seducer was; neither have I ever heard. It was about nine o'clock in the evening of the murder — that is to say, the evening before last — when I took up Miss Walters's supper to her chamber. I placed the tray upon the table, wished her good night, and quitted the room. I locked the door outside, in obedience to strict orders which I had received from Mrs. Lindley. At a quarter to eleven Mrs. Lindley told me and my fellow servant that we might go up to bed, but that she intended to sit up a little longer. We bade her good night and left her in the parlour. That was the last time I saw her alive. It was about twenty minutes past eleven, when I and my fellow servant, who slept in the same room together, were alarmed by a sudden noise as if something was rushing wildly up the stairs from the bottom of the house to the top. We opened the door and heard the cat mewing and crying in a fearful manner, and

an idea struck us that something was wrong. So we descended the stairs together, and as we passed Caroline Walters's room, we saw that the door was standing wide open. We did not stop to examine how it had been opened, but continued our way down-stairs, when we met Miss Walters rushing away from the parlour as if she was mad. On seeing us, she uttered a dreadful scream and fainted. My fellow servant remained with her, while I went into the parlour; and there I found my poor ' missus ' murdered and weltering in her blood. I raised an alarm, constables came, and Caroline Walters was given into custody."

The fellow servant of this witness corroborated all the above details; and the surgeon who had attended Caroline at the period of her miscarriage deposed to the irritability and dislike which the prisoner had manifested on that occasion toward Mrs. Lindley. The same surgeon had examined the body of the murdered woman; and he declared that the fatal blow had been inflicted by a sharp dagger which had penetrated the heart in such a manner that death must have been instantaneous and most probably unaccompanied by even a moan.

We must here observe that Counsellor Sharply cross-examined each of the witnesses with all the skill and tact for which the learned gentleman was so celebrated; but he failed to shake their testimony in any detail.

Mr. Peter Grumley now directed his man Mobbs to enter the witness-box, and that worthy deposed to the following effect:

" I went over to Fore Street yesterday morning soon arter daybreak, in consequence of orders which I received from my superior," and here Mobbs jerked his left-hand thumb over his shoulder toward Grumley. " At the house in Fore Street," he continued, " I examined the chamber which had been occupied by the prisoner, Miss Walters; and I found that the door had been opened by the removal of the lock. In fact the lock, which was inside the door, had been unscrewed and took off as clean as anythink. A knife had evidently been used as a turn-screw."

" This case," said the magistrate, as Mobbs stood down from the witness-box, " should have been heard yesterday; but it stood over until to-day in order to enable the officers to collect all the necessary evidence. Is any further testimony forthcoming? "

"I think, your worship," said Grumley, "that you've heerd quite enough to induce your worship to commit this young gal to take her trial at the sessions."

"Have you anything to urge in behalf of your client, Mr. Sharply?" inquired the magistrate.

"I shall reserve the defence, your worship, until a future occasion," was the learned gentleman's answer.

"Then have you aught to advance, Caroline Walters," demanded the justice of the peace, "wherefore you should not be committed to take your trial on the charge of murder?"

The young girl glanced rapidly toward Grumley, and the equally vivid look of encouragement which she received from him at once dissipated any suspicions which she might have entertained relative to his sincerity, when she saw how strongly and indeed overwhelmingly he had marshalled his array of evidence against her.

"I wish to speak a few words, may it please your worship," she said, in a firm tone. Then, regardless of an impatient ejaculation which broke from Counsellor Sharply, who naturally feared that she was about to crown the damage already done by her imprudence, she cried, in a louder and more resolute, but still musically feminine voice, "For I wish to proclaim to your worship and to all present that I am innocent, yes, innocent as an angel of this black iniquity which is imputed to me. And one word more would I speak — only one word," she continued, while a breathless silence pervaded the officials and the audience; "and that is to explain something which I cannot allow to remain another moment in doubt or mystery. You have heard that I was locked up in my chamber at Mrs. Lindley's house. But it was not so much on account of any quarrel which had taken place, as because I had expressed a desire — nay, even a determination — to quit the establishment; and Mrs. Lindley had locked up my clothes and my purse in her own parlour, with a view to render me the more effectually a prisoner beneath her roof. What course, then, did I adopt? I resolved to fly stealthily; and hence the removal of the lock from the door of my bedchamber, hence my visit to the parlour in order to break open the cupboard where the midwife had concealed my clothes. The rest can be imagined, for you may easily conceive my horror and alarm when,

on entering the parlour, I beheld the ghastly scene which made me fly away with all the speed, trepidation, and anguish of a guilty person."

Caroline Walters paused for a few moments, and the deep silence which reigned in the court remained unbroken.

"But I have declared that I am innocent, and I can prove the truth of my averment," she suddenly exclaimed, the strong emphasis of her words and the abruptness of her manner producing a strange excitement throughout the audience. "Yes, give me the opportunity, and I will undertake to prove my innocence within an hour."

"And what opportunity do you require?" asked the magistrate.

"I demand permission to visit the house where the murder was committed," returned Caroline; "and to the constable who may take charge of me thither will I show such unmistakable evidences that the deed must have been committed by another, that your worship will order me to be discharged at once."

"Can you not sufficiently instruct a constable that he may proceed to the house and obtain the testimony to which you allude?" asked the magistrate.

"No, your worship," replied the young girl, in a resolute tone. "It is absolutely necessary that I should go thither myself."

The magistrate appeared puzzled, and he consulted in whispers with his clerk for a few minutes. At length he turned toward the head constable, saying aloud, "Well, Mr. Grumley, what do you think of this singular application on the part of the prisoner?"

"It isn't for me to express an opinion in your worship's presence," responded the constable, in a deferential manner; "but if your worship chooses to order a remand until to-morrow morning, I sha'n't offer no sort of objection."

"And in the meantime you will take the young woman to the house in Fore Street?" said the magistrate, in a tone of half-inquiry and half-command.

"Your worship's instructions shall be attended to," answered Grumley, dexterously throwing upon the magistrate all the responsibility of the proposed step, though actually encouraging it by his observations.

"Then let the case stand remanded until to-morrow at

eleven o'clock," exclaimed the magistrate, rising from his desk.

"Clear the court!" bawled the usher, and while the spectators poured out of one door, Caroline Walters was conducted through another by Grumley and Mobbs into an adjacent room, where refreshments were set before her.

"You have played your part uncommon well, young miss," said Grumley; "although you did do a little more in the palavering line than I had recommended. But, howsomever, we've gained our pint, and that's the principal. It's now six o'clock," he added, after consulting the huge silver watch which he drew from his fob. "Lord, how time does slip away in them courts, to be sure! But we'll stay here until about half-past eight, under pretence of letting the crowd disperse aforehand; and then we'll slip quietly off, all three of us, to Fore Street. I say, Mobbs, old feller, what time is the boat to be in readiness?"

"At a quarter to nine punctiwal," was the response.

"The boat?" exclaimed Caroline Walters. "Is that intended for my escape? If so, whither do you mean to send me?" she demanded, a vague terror coming over her.

"Don't be alarmed, miss," said Grumley, in a reassuring tone. "A boat certainly enters into our plans as a item of the arrangements; but it will be at your orders, to land you where you like. And now don't ask no more questions at present, but eat some grub and make your mind easy. Come, Mobbs, you and me will just tool a pipe and dip our beaks into this here jug of his worship's ale, until it's time to be jogging."

The two constables accordingly seated themselves near the fire which burned in the grate, and while they smoked their pipes, Caroline Walters fell into a deep reverie upon the past, the present, and the future.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE REVISIT TO THE MIDWIFE'S HOUSE

It was just as the clock at the archbishop's palace in Lambeth was chiming half-past eight, that Mr. Peter Grumley and his man Mobbs led Caroline Walters forth from the back door of the magistrate's dwelling.

The young girl had neither bonnet nor shawl, for those who had hurried her off to prison so peremptorily on the night of the murder had not manifested the consideration or the forethought to provide her with any additional garment to her own clothing; and thus she had nothing but her ordinary apparel to protect her against the night air.

Neither Grumley nor Mobbs now took any notice of this circumstance until they had proceeded some short distance from the dwelling of the justice of the peace; and then, suddenly perceiving that the young girl was shivering with the cold and that her teeth were chattering violently, as she walked between himself and his companion, Grumley exclaimed, "By goles! this is too bad, the poor creatur' is well-nigh starved."

"Why didn't she eat the bread and cheese that his worship ordered to be given her?" growled Mobbs, for Caroline had refused to partake of any refreshment at the magistrate's abode.

"I don't mean that kind of starwation, you cussed fool," exclaimed Mr. Grumley. "I mean she's starved with cold."

"Oh, never mind, never mind," said the young girl, crossing her arms over her bosom. "We shall soon be there, and then I can procure some warmer apparel."

"Well, come along, then," observed Grumley, quickening his pace, and making Caroline take his arm, he led her

along at a rate which soon imparted a healthier circulation to her blood.

In ten minutes they reached Fore Street, and the door of the well-known house was opened by one of the servants who had borne evidence against Caroline at the examination.

" Ah, and so you are come here, to the house which you have made one of mourning, miss," said the menial, in a bitter tone, the instant that the light which she held in her hand threw its rays upon the countenance of Caroline.

" Silence, woman, I am innocent," ejaculated the young girl, in a tone which made the servant feel that it might really be the truth which was thus solemnly and emphatically averred.

" Yes, silence, and let's do our work without bickering or ill words," said Mr. Grumley. " Come now, shut the front door, that's right. Which room is it that you want to go to, miss? " he demanded, addressing the question to Caroline Walters.

" Say your own," whispered Mobbs in her ear, the servant not catching the hint thus hastily conveyed.

" My own," accordingly exclaimed Caroline; " and I wish to be alone with the constables," she added of her own accord.

" Good," whispered Mobbs.

" Well, then, come along," said Mr. Grumley. " Here, young 'ooman, lend us your candle," he added, as he took the light from the servant's hand. " Which is the parlour where the old lady is laid out? "

" In there," answered Mobbs, pointing to the door opening from the passage, where this conversation took place. " But I don't suppose you want to see her? "

" Not I, indeed," responded Grumley. " Come, Miss Walters, you lead the way, if you please, and me and my man will foller."

Caroline accordingly ascended the stairs, which appeared to creak ominously beneath her feet and those of the two men behind her; and the atmosphere of the house seemed laden with that thick, fetid, nauseating smell which so frequently denotes the presence of a corpse. It even appeared that the very walls felt clammy as her hands touched them while she was thus ascending the staircase.

And all was silent throughout the dwelling, — all save

the sounds of the footsteps of the young girl and the two constables, for the females who were lodging in the establishment at the time of the murder had sought other asylums the very morning after the terrible catastrophe.

In a few minutes Caroline Walters reached the chamber which had so lately been her own, and the two constables followed her into the room, Mobbs closing the door behind him.

"Now what is to be done?" demanded Caroline, goaded by suspense to a pitch of intolerable impatience respecting the safety and the escape which had been promised her.

"Don't be afeard, miss," said Grumley; "all will be right in a moment. Look out, Mobbs!"

And Mobbs, noiselessly opening the window, thrust his head forth.

The night was very dark, and the Thames gurgled as its full tide swept rapidly on beneath that open casement.

A vague terror once more came upon Caroline Walters, and her startled looks wandered rapidly from Mobbs, who was still leaning out of the window, to Peter Grumley, who was standing in the middle of the chamber with the candle in his hand.

"It's all right," observed Mobbs, suddenly drawing in his head and turning away from the window. "The boat is about ten or a dozen yards distant."

"The boat again," ejaculated Caroline; and she threw a terrified glance at the open casement.

"Now, young lady," said Grumley, suddenly speaking in a rapid and decisive tone, "the moment for your escape is come. Don't you see what you have done already, and what you have still got to do? You have inveigled me and my partner here on pretence of producing some proof of your innocence, and while him and me is looking another way, you opens that window softly but speedily, and you jumps clean out into the Thames."

"Oh, horror!" exclaimed Caroline, clasping her hands entreatingly; "would you murder me?"

"Don't be silly, gal," said Grumley, in a tone which instantly recalled her to herself. "Well, you jumps out, I was observing, and me and Mobbs haven't time to save you. To-morrow all London will believe that you preferred suicide by drowning to death on the scaffold by the hand of

Jack Ketch. But no one, save and except just them few as is concerned in the business, will suspect that there was a boat a-waiting in readiness close underneath this window, and that the people in the said boat picked you up and rowed away with you in a jiffy. Neither will it be imagined that in this selfsame boat there was a disguise, not only in the shape of garments, but also for staining the complexion — "

" Ah, now I understand you, Mr. Grumley, and I thank you, my God! I thank you most sincerely," exclaimed Caroline, taking the constable's hand and pressing it as warmly and as fervently as if she had just found a father in that man.

" Well, well, miss, I hope you'll be happy, and that you'll take care and not be caught, that's all," said the head constable. " But, by the bye, here's the fifty guineas which Mrs. Brace sent you."

" Keep them for yourself," said Caroline, gently repulsing the bag which the officer endeavoured to force upon her.

" No, not I, miss, thank'ee all the same," he said. " I'm both just and honest after my own fashion, and I'm well paid for all this business."

" Not for worlds would I receive that money, since it comes from Mrs. Brace! " exclaimed Caroline, in a tone which was decisive. " And now, farewell."

" Farewell, and good luck to you, miss," said Grumley, while Mobbs echoed the sentiment.

Then Caroline Walters approached the window and threw a piercing, penetrating glance into the deep obscurity which hung like a mist upon the river. But she caught a glimpse of the boat, — she could even see the upturned countenance of some one watching the casement, — and, confident that it was all as Grumley had assured her, she leaped upon the window-sill; then, holding her breath tightly to suppress any ejaculation that might rise to her tongue, she sprang courageously forth.

There was a tremendous splash, and this was followed by the sound of oars; but Grumley and Mobbs waited to hear no more, and, flinging open the door, they rushed from the room, exclaiming in voices which simulated extreme terror to perfection, " She has drowned herself! She has drowned herself! "

CHAPTER XXVII

BELLENDEN PRIORY

We must now shift the scenes for a short space, in order to introduce our readers to that manison where, as George Woodfall so confidently predicted, Rose Foster experienced a cordial welcome and immediately found a home.

At the period of which we are writing, Bellenden Priory was one of the most remarkable features of interest at the West End of the metropolis, — not only in an architectural point of view, but likewise on account of its great antiquity. It stood a little way retired from the western side of the Edgeware Road, from which thoroughfare the garden was separated and indeed concealed by a high wall fronted with flintstones. In the middle of this rude and rugged boundary there was a Gothic portico containing a massive gate studded with large nails, and a bell-pull of thick iron wire, with a deer's foot for a handle, appeared on one side of this solemn-looking entrance.

Within the boundary there was a large garden laid out in so tasteful a manner as to afford a striking relief, with its modern characteristics, to the mediæval style of the spacious building which stood in the midst; and on a small piece of water surrounded by picturesque grottoes a couple of stately swans and several aquatic birds from foreign climes floated about.

The priory itself was a large, rambling edifice, exhibiting in its different parts various kinds of architecture, according to the ages in which additions had been made to the structure. The front was comparatively modern, three stories high, and with tall but narrow casements, each one opening on a stone balcony filled with evergreen plants. The principal entrance consisted of oaken folding doors standing beneath a portico,

which was reached by an ascent of a dozen steps; and the marble hall within was surrounded by suits of armour and marble statues. The parapet of the façade was battlemented, and at each angle there was a low spire of slate-work.

This frontage looked toward the Edgeware Road; but the southern side of the priory was the most ancient, and had preserved its monastic appearance, with its massive walls, long and deeply set windows, low doors, and high pointed roofs. The northern side was only two stories high and was somewhat in the Elizabethan style of architecture; and the western portion of the priory was a confused jumble of old towers and wooden outhouses, a portion of a cloister, and a spacious stabling.

Such a large, rambling, and ill-connected edifice had necessarily several doors opening into the grounds, and likewise many passages and staircases within. But the interior was very handsomely fitted up, and all the rooms in the front part of the building were furnished in as modern a style as good taste could possibly render consistent with the architectural peculiarities of windows, cornices, chimney-pieces, and recesses. Thus the priory was a mansion where elegance and splendour combined to ensure the existence of every comfort and luxury, without completely destroying the effect produced upon the eye and the imagination by the solemn grandeur of the structure itself.

Such was Bellenden Priory, the foundation-stone of which was said to have been laid in the reign of Richard I, — that well-meaning but mistaken fanatic who was the cause of millions of lives being lost on the plains of Palestine. From the earliest date of its existence, the priory had belonged to the Bellenden family, which was even more ancient still, for the genealogical tree traced its descent from one of the Norman ruffians who came over with William the Conqueror.

But although the priory had remained for so many centuries in the hands of the Bellendens, an intermarriage with the equally ancient family of Montgomery had by some means or other given rise to litigation respecting the ownership of the mansion and the annexed estate; and these lawsuits had commenced about thirty years previously to the date of our tale. There were likewise estates in Warwickshire which

had belonged to the Bellendens from generation to generation; but which were even more perilously involved than the priory property, on account of the claims of the Montgomery family. Touching these matters, however, we shall have to treat more in detail hereafter; for the present we must speak of the Marchioness of Bellenden, the present owner of the priory.

This lady was now in her thirty-seventh year, and was famed for her beauty, her accomplishments, and her benevolence. A glance at her early history is necessary for the purposes of our tale. She belonged to the Montgomery family, and becoming an orphan at a tender age, was left to the care of an aunt, who, being a mercenary and intriguing woman, resolved to ensure her niece a brilliant position by means of a "good marriage." Thus, scarcely had she attained her seventeenth year, when the innocent, artless, and beautiful Laura was commanded to receive the addresses of the Marquis of Bellenden, an old man in his sixty-second winter. Then there was a sad and even terrible scene between the orphan Laura and her aunt the Dowager-Countess Montgomery; and although there were no witnesses to that scene, it was nevertheless rumoured at the time that Laura had thrown herself at her aunt's feet and had confessed that her affections were already engaged. But whatever were the reasons that Laura urged against the marriage proposed on her behalf, certain it is that the Dowager-Countess Montgomery was inexorable; and it was represented to the unhappy Laura that family reasons required the tremendous sacrifice at her hands, inasmuch as the litigation which had then been in progress about ten years would be amicably settled by this second intermarriage of the two families. In short, Laura was dragged, as it were, to the altar; and the young creature of seventeen became the wife of the old nobleman of sixty-two. The honeymoon (such a honeymoon as it must have been!) was passed at the Bellenden estate in Warwickshire; and then the marquis brought home his bride to the priory. But he did not long survive this most unequal alliance into which he had forced his youthful victim; and his death took place with a suddenness which seemed to savour of a just retribution for his cruelty in blighting all the best and purest affections of her young heart. The family physician pronounced his death

to have arisen from apoplexy; and the remains of the last lord of Bellenden were removed with grand funereal pomp into Warwickshire, to be interred in the family vault at the old church where all his ancestors had been laid in due succession.

The death of the Marquis of Bellenden without male issue instantaneously revived the lawsuits respecting the heritage of the estates. The marchioness, however, kept possession; and her opponents were the male members of the Montgomery family from which she herself was sprung. Vainly did her aunt, the dowager-countess, endeavour to induce her niece to come to an amicable settlement: the young widow was resolute in her refusal, for she felt that she had been basely sacrificed in the most important event of a woman's life, and she would therefore show no favour to those who had thus made her the victim of a selfishness which did not, however, obtain its ends. Time passed on, years rolled by, and the lawsuit dragged its slow length along in that tremendous tribunal of modern inquisition, the Court of Chancery. The Dowager-Countess Montgomery soon grew wearied of making overtures to her niece, or else was too proud to reiterate them; and thus at the period when we introduce the Marchioness of Bellenden to our readers, she had been a widow twenty years, she was still in possession of the priory and the Warwickshire estates, the old dowager was still alive, and the lawsuit appeared as far off from a settlement as ever.

Yes, the Marchioness of Bellenden was now thirty-seven; and never once during her long widowhood of twenty years had she laid aside her mourning apparel. The tenacity with which she clung to it was most singular, most remarkable, most unaccountable. That she thus permanently regretted the sexagenarian who had been her husband for a few months, she herself did not for a moment pretend; in fact, as she had never loved him, and had been chained to him against her inclination and despite of her most fervent prayers to the contrary, she could not possibly have ever regretted him at all. Nor did any measure of respect for his memory furnish a hypothesis to solve the mystery of this perseverance in maintaining the weeds of a widow; and therefore was the circumstance evidently a secret belonging to herself, and to herself alone.

Wealthy, handsome, highly accomplished, and of a reputation unsullied by even the slightest breath of scandal, the Marchioness of Bellenden had, as a matter of course, received many offers of marriage during her long widowhood; but she had refused them each and all, though some were of a nature so eligible as to have appeared beyond the possibility of experiencing a negative. And on those occasions, when thus pressed for a decision in so delicate and important a matter as an invitation to change her condition once more, she would glance significantly but not hypocritically down at her mourning garb, and observe with a singular and almost martyrized air of resolution that she had determined to carry those weeds throughout her earthly career, unto the threshold of the grave itself.

In personal appearance the Marchioness of Bellenden was a woman who could not fail to create a feeling of interest even in the mind of the most callous observer of the female sex. She was tall, well-formed, slightly inclining to embonpoint, but characterized by so much elegance and grace that every attitude and every movement had its own peculiar charm. Her bust was of full and voluptuous proportions, the slope of her shoulders was admirable, and her arms, though robust, were exquisitely symmetrical and dazzlingly white. But the high corsage and the long sleeves veiled the superb neck and the polished arms; yet the beauty of the throat and the faultless formation of the snowy hands, aided also by the shape which the black dress took from the rich contours of the bosom, allowed ample scope for the exercise of delicious imaginings in respect to the charms thus modestly concealed.

The countenance of the Marchioness of Bellenden was very handsome, and its beauty was so well preserved that, despite even of the widow's weeds which certainly have a tendency to mar the appearance of youthfulness, she did not seem to be more than thirty. Her eyes were large and of a soft liquid blue; her hair, which she wore in bands and did not permit the close fitting cap altogether to conceal, was of a dark chestnut, not particularly luxuriant, but with a gloss shining on its surface as the lustre of a lamp displays the richness of velvet; her teeth were white as ivory and faultlessly even; and there was a vermilion freshnesss upon the lips which must inevitably have made the admirer of the sex

think within himself how great was the pity if no tender kisses were ever more to be gathered there.

The manners of the Marchioness of Bellenden were not too elegant to be cordial, not too fashionably refined to be winning. Elegant and refined they assuredly were, but not with that glacial formality, chilling reserve, and ceremonial haughtiness which seems to calculate the distance between individuals with a view to decide what amount of civility may be vouchsafed or how much cold constraint is to be assumed. No, Lady Bellenden knew full well how to manifest that graceful condescension which made her inferiors feel at their ease in her presence; while to her equals she exhibited an affability and amiability which, though always, as it were, showing through a certain settled melancholy alike of expression and manner, nevertheless endeared her to all her friends and acquaintances.

Such was the Marchioness of Bellenden, the lady to whose care George Woodfall introduced the orphan Rose Foster.

And, as he had foretold, cordial, most cordial was the welcome which the much-persecuted girl experienced at the hands of the benevolent lady. An elegant chamber was assigned to Rose on the southern side of the priory; and when she awoke on the following morning a milliner with a quantity of ready-made apparel was introduced into her presence. New and excellent raiment for the orphan's immediate use was thus provided; and the dressmaker had the orders of the marchioness to take Miss Foster's commands for the completion of everything that was necessary for her toilet.

In the afternoon George Woodfall called at the priory to pay his respects to the marchioness and inquire concerning the health of Rose, and her ladyship insisted that he should stay to dinner. Thus at the time that poor Caroline Walters was undergoing the examination before the Lambeth magistrate, Rose Foster was conversing with the marchioness and the young artist in one of the elegantly furnished parlours of Bellenden Priory.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE AMOROUS CONSTABLE

THE clocks at the West End were striking eleven when Mr. Peter Grumley and his man Mobbs stopped at the door of Mrs. Brace's establishment in Pall Mall.

" Now I shall say good night to you, old feller," observed the head constable to his factotum, " 'cause I promised to call and let Mrs. Brace know that the young gal had succeeded in escaping. And besides," added Mr. Grumley, lowering his voice to a significant whisper, " she's a uncommon pleasant lady is Mrs. Brace, and I sha'n't mind a spending half an hour or so with her."

" Well, I wish you luck, Mr. Grumley," said Mobbs. " We shall meet in the mornin' at the office. Good night, sir."

" Good night," repeated Grumley, as he knocked at Mrs. Brace's door, while Mobbs hurried away to his own abode.

The summons of the head constable was almost immediately answered by the discreet lady's-maid, Harriet; and he was forthwith ushered into the parlour where the milliner was anxiously awaiting his arrival.

Harriet withdrew, and the moment the door closed behind her, Mrs. Brace demanded, in a quick tone, " What news? Have you succeeded? "

" Everythink as right as a trivet, ma'am," was the prompt reply; for Mr. Grumley saw that the lady was labouring under considerable suspense.

" Caroline is at liberty? " she exclaimed.

" As free as you and me, ma'am," rejoined the head constable; " and as safe too, if so be she has made proper use of the disguise which was provided for her."

" Which she has no doubt done," observed Mrs. Brace, from whose mind a tremendous weight had been suddenly

taken by the welcome intelligence received from the constable. " But pray be seated, and help yourself to whatever you fancy," she observed, pointing toward a chair and glancing at the table on which there were decanters of wine and the spirit-stand.

" Thank'ee, ma'am," said Grumley; " and with your permission I'll mix myself a glass of hot brandy and water, just to take the chill out of my stomach."

" Do so," returned Mrs. Brace; " and tell me all that has occurred to-day."

" The thing has been managed as nice as possible," said Mr. Grumley, after having taken two or three experimental sips at the grog which he had just brewed; and smacking his lips in unalloyed approval of the beverage, he continued thus: " I all along knowed the evidence was so dead against her that it would be impossible to get her off by fair means, and I told you as much yesterday evening at Bow Street. So I had a plan cut and dried to save her by stratagem. In short, I resolved that she should ask the magistrate to let her visit the house in Fore Street for the purpose of procuring testimony to prove her innocence; and, when once there, I was determined that she should either jump out of the winder of her own accord, or else I meant to put her out."

" Good God! " ejaculated the milliner, trembling all over and gasping for breath; " you do not mean to say — that is — you would not have me believe that — that you — murdered her? "

" There wasn't no necessity for that, ma'am," answered Grumley. " The winder, as p'raps you know, looks on the Thames, and my plan was to have a boat in readiness to pick the young gal up, and a disguise in the boat for her to assume without delay."

" And was this extraordinary plan realized? " demanded Mrs. Brace, shuddering as she fancied she beheld the unfortunate girl, Caroline Walters, struggling in the waters of the rapid stream.

" Realized, and with triumphant success, as they say upon the playbills," answered Grumley. " Miss Walters jumped out as courageous as a diver and as light as a cat, and the boat picked her up in a moment. Then me and my man Mobbs rushed out of the room, raised an alarm, and pretended to be quite distracted at the hawful occurrence. We

got a wherry as soon as we could, made the boatmen pull us up and down along the shore, but of course couldn't discover any trace of the young lady, and so we pretended to give up the search in despair."

"And the impression will be that she was drowned?" said Mrs. Brace, interrogatively.

"Just so, my dear madam," replied Grumley, throwing an amorous look on the milliner as he drank his brandy and water. "The newspapers will have a long and pathetic account of the business; and, in fact, it all looks natural enow. A young gal driven to desperation, sees that she is sure to be committed for trial; if committed, knows that she will be found guilty; if found guilty, is well conwinced that she'll be hung; and so, to prewent all these unpleasantnesses, hits upon the ingenious trick of getting herself taken to Fore Street, where she's well aware that the means of suicide is within her reach — 'cause why, the river rolls under the winder. There it is all in a nutshell, and a wery pathetic, romantic, and affecting history it makes."

"But will you not be compromised?" asked Mrs. Brace.

"Not a atom," returned Grumley, with a sly laugh. "I took all my measures too well to leave the door open for any suspicion against me. When I went to fetch the young gal away from the prison, a little before one to-day, I remarked to the turnkey, in a careless, offhand way, that she was sure to be committed, as I had got up a precious strong case against her. So he wouldn't think that I was at all friendly disposed toward her. Then I really did produce an overwhelming force of testimony against her; and I myself was the fust to ask the magistrate to commit her, before he himself or his clerk had uttered an opinion on the subject. Again, when Miss Walters requested permission to visit the house in Fore Street, I wouldn't appear to help her at all in the matter; on the contrary, I managed to throw all the responsibility of the proceedings on the justice of the peace himself. In short, I played my cards so well, ma'am, that I can't possibly be blamed."

"Not for allowing her to escape from your custody?" said Mrs. Brace.

"To be sure not," ejaculated Grumley. "Suppose, now, that me and my man Mobbs had let her run away from us while we were taking her to the house in Fore Street, then

indeed the world might have said that we were either bribed or that we showed a most unpardonable negligence. But when once we got the girl in safety into the house, who could have supposed that she would suddenly open a casement and fling herself into the Thames below? Don't you see the difference, ma'am? " and as Mr. Grumley asked this question he winked his eye knowingly.

" I now comprehend the full meaning and force of your precaution," observed the milliner. " And during the examination before the magistrate, was anything said at all calculated to compromise — "

" You or your establishment, ma'am? " exclaimed Grumley, who, perceiving that the lady hesitated, finished the sentence for her. " Not a word, not a syllable, I can assure you. In fact, I put a stop to all that, my dear madam, when I was taking the young gal along to the magistrate's house."

" Ah! then she did threaten? " exclaimed Mrs. Brace, inquiringly; for she was anxious to learn how far the revelations of Caroline Walters might have extended.

" Well, she did threaten a many things, ma'am," said Mr. Grumley, surveying the milliner with looks so full of unmistakable grossness that she began to be not only disgusted but likewise alarmed. " It ain't, however, of no use wexing yourself on that account, my dear creatur'," added the constable.

" Oh, no, not at all," ejaculated Mrs. Brace. " But I will now hand you over the remaining moiety of the promised reward," she observed, starting from her seat.

And as she crossed the room to open the writing-desk, which stood on a side-table, Mr. Grumley followed her with his eyes; and the rustling of her silk dress, the glimpse which he caught of her robust but well-turned ankles and her very genteelly shaped feet, the gleaming of her white neck and arms in the lamplight, and the coquettish French cap so admirably becoming the milliner's style of beauty, — all these produced an indescribable effect upon Mr. Grumley's sensations, and his blood, inflamed alike by lust and potent liquor, appeared to boil in his veins.

The milliner took from her writing-desk a number of bank-notes, and when she returned to her seat she was more profoundly struck and more seriously alarmed than at first by the singular expression of countenance with which Mr. Grum-

ley regarded her; and although she was well experienced in all the looks and glances which constitute an index to the strong, fiery, or libidinous passions of the soul, yet her pride would scarcely permit her to believe that the coarse, vulgar, ill-favoured, and sordidly apparelled police-constable could possibly aspire to any tender concession on her part.

"Here is your money, Mr. Grumley," she said, affecting a pleasant but patronizing smile. Then, the more firmly to impress upon his mind the fact that she regarded him as an inferior whom she was paying for his hireling services, she observed, "You have really well earned the amount, and I have every reason to be satisfied with your conduct. I could not possibly have employed a better agent in the matter."

"I'm glad you're satisfied, my dear creatur'," returned the constable, squeezing her hand as he took the bank-notes which she gave him, and accompanying that evidence of his admiration by a look of amorous grossness.

Mrs. Brace drew back her hand rapidly, and assumed so severe an expression of countenance that Mr. Peter Grumley could not help observing that she was offended; but he only laughed, and then proceeded to count the bank-notes with a businesslike deliberation.

"Right as a trivet," he exclaimed, when this methodical task was accomplished; and, securing the money about his person, he fixed his eyes long and earnestly on the milliner's countenance. "You're a wery handsome woman, a wery handsome woman," he repeated, "and I don't know when I've been so much excited by any lady's personal appearance. In fact, I feel all over nohow, ma'am, and that's God's truth."

"Mr. Grumley, I am surprised at you," said the milliner, her cheeks becoming scarlet. "But you cannot mean anything save a joke," she exclaimed, instantaneously recovering her presence of mind and forcing herself to smile.

"By goles! I never was less inclined to joke in all my life, my dear creatur'," cried Mr. Grumley. "There seems to be a wery devil in my heart and hell-fire in my blood, prompting me to do anythink desperate, so as — "

"What do you mean, sir? " exclaimed the milliner, starting from her seat in alarm; for the eyes of the constable appeared to devour her with their looks of burning lust.

"I mean, my dear beautiful creatur'," said Grumley, also

quitting his chair and extending his arms toward her, " that I must and will have a kiss, even if I die for it."

And before Mrs. Brace could offer any resistance or even give utterance to a word of remonstrance, she was locked in the rude embrace of the herculean constable, and his coarse mouth was fastened to her own luscious lips.

" Now will you leave me? " she said, in a rapid and excited tone, as he at length relinquished his hold upon her; and, trembling all over with rage and with a countenance that showed its deadly pallor even through the soft tint of rouge that was wont to render her cheeks so captivating with its roseate bloom, she clung to the mantelpiece for support.

" Leave you! No, by Heaven, I won't leave you till to-morrow morning," exclaimed Grumley, maddened with the contact of the milliner's lips, the sweets of which he had just enjoyed, and longing once more to feel the warm pressure of her glowing bosom against his chest.

" This is an insolence, unsupportable, intolerable," gasped Mrs. Brace, her eyes actually becoming haggard with mingled alarm and horror as she read upon the countenance of the officer all the ferocity of those passions which were raging in his soul. Then all on a sudden, she extended her hand, with frantic desperation, toward the bell-pull.

But Grumley, anticipating the movement, once more caught her in his arms; and, in spite of her desperate struggles, for she feared to alarm the whole house by shrieking for help, he succeeded in imprinting a dozen kisses upon her lips, that were now parched with rage, and on her cheeks, that were burning from the same emotion.

Almost annihilated by the intolerable disgust arising from these odious caresses, and by the terrible apprehensions which the rabid lasciviousness of the monster's manner and looks excited in her brain, the milliner sank, breathless and exhausted, upon a seat.

" Now, listen to me," said the constable, speaking with the hot breath and parched tongue of a brutal lust. " I've taken a fancy to you, and I'm determined to gratify my whim. I know you ain't overparticular yourself, and I also know that a strange man's sleeping in your house won't be any unusual thing. So, let us have no palaver — "

" Ah! " ejaculated the miserable Mrs. Brace, her tongue unlocking through the very poignancy of her despair; " that

"SHE WAS LOCKED IN THE RUDE EMBRACE"
Photogravure from original by Learned

getting his chair and extending his arms toward her, "that I must and will have a kiss even if I die for it."

And before Mrs. Grant could offer any resistance or even give utterance to a word of remonstrance, she was locked in the rude embrace of the Cerulean constable, and his coarse mouth was pressed to her own luscious lips.

"Now will you leave me?" she said, in a rapid and excited tone, as he at length relinquished his hold upon her; and, trembling all over with rage and with a countenance that showed the deepest pallor even through the soft tint of rouge that was used to render her cheeks so captivating with its natural bloom, she clung to the mantelpiece for support.

"Never, pet! No, by Heaven, I won't leave you till to-morrow morning," exclaimed Grumley, maddened with the contact of the milliner's lips, the nectar of which he had just sipped, and longing once more to feel the warm pressure of her glowing bosom against his own.

"This is an insolence, unsupportable, intolerable," cried Mrs. Grant, her eyes actually becoming bloodshot with conflicting alarm and horror as she read upon the countenance of the officer all the evil passions which were raging in his soul. "Stand off, sir!" and she extended her hand, with frantic desperation, toward the bell-pull.

But Grumley, anticipating the movement, once more caught her in his arms; and, in spite of her desperate struggles, for she feared to alarm the whole house by shrieking for help, he succeeded in imprinting a dozen kisses upon her lips, that were now pallid with rage, and on her cheeks, that were burning from the same emotion.

Almost annihilated by the intolerable disgust arising from these odious caresses, and by the terrible apprehensions which the wild looks and words of the monster's manner had excited in her breast, Mrs. Grant, breathless and exhausted, [illegible]

"SHE WAS LOCKED IN THE RUDE EMBRACE"
Photogravure from original by Learned

"Ah!" [illegible] unlocking through the very [illegible] of her despair, "that

ungrateful Caroline Walters has vilified me and my establishment — I see it all."

"Well, she did tell me a few plain truths, my dear creatur'," observed Grumley; "but not more than I had guessed beforehand. For the instant that you made me go with you to the prince, and when I found that his Royal Highness was so very much interested in you and so anxious that them young gals should be got off, oh! oh! thought I to myself — "

"Enough! enough!" cried Mrs. Brace, in a tone of almost abject entreaty. "Tell me what sum of money you now require to induce you to leave me at once."

"Lord bless your dear heart," returned Mr. Grumley, "what a mercenary son of a gun you must take me to be! But I should be ashamed to receive another suverin at your hands, whereas I do mean to help myself to no end of kisses."

"Dare not approach me again, or I will alarm the house," said Mrs. Brace, in a hoarse, thick, and rapid tone, while her hands were clenched until the nails of her fingers almost penetrated the plump white flesh.

"My dear angel, a chap as is accustomed to grapple with thieves and the most desperatest waggabones isn't likely to be afeared of a pretty woman's anger," said Grumley. "So let us have no more nonsense; it's only delaying pleasure, and my resolution's fixed to pass the night with you — "

"Good God! is it possible?" moaned Mrs. Brace, sinking back in her chair.

But ere another word was spoken, the door opened hastily, and Harriet, the lady's-maid, entered the room.

"What is the matter?" demanded the milliner, instantaneously recalled to herself by the sudden and almost precipitate appearance of her faithful abigail.

"A person wishes to see you, ma'am — nay, insists upon forcing herself into your presence," replied Harriet. "She will take no refusal."

"But who is she?" asked Mrs. Brace, relieved from the first dreadful fear that it was her husband who thus demanded an audience.

"That woman, you know, ma'am, who came here one morning and sent up a letter, when you were engaged with Lord Florimel, ma'am — you remember," added the lady's-maid, speaking with hesitation on account of Grumley.

"Here I am to answer for myself," said a voice just out-

side the door; and immediately afterward a young woman, dressed with great plainness, entered the room.

"The Gallows' Widow, by goles!" exclaimed Grumley, springing toward her.

An ejaculation of mingled surprise and terror burst from the lips of Elizabeth Marks, for she it indeed was; and she made a desperate effort to break from the grasp which the constable had fixed upon her.

But wrenching around her arm with a violence that made her sink almost upon her knees, he said, in a savage tone, "Be quiet, or I'll do you a mischief."

And the woman, completely overpowered, attempted no further resistance.

CHAPTER XXIX

A COMPROMISE

Mrs. Brace had not failed to recognize Elizabeth Marks the instant her looks fell upon the pale but far from ill-favoured countenance of that woman whom she knew to be her husband's mistress. And here we should observe that the Gallows' Widow was not attired in her wonted apparel of mourning weeds; for she had laid aside that too distinctive dress ever since she became notoriously implicated in the affair of Joe Warren's escape from Newgate. Nevertheless, it was easy to recognize her, now that the dark veil which she wore to conceal her countenance was lifted from those pale features; and thus a mortal terror was carried to the soul of Mrs. Brace at the very same instant that Peter Grumley pounced upon the Gallows' Widow and made her his prisoner.

For the milliner now perceived at a glance all the variety and menacing nature of those difficulties which had suddenly sprung up around her. Elizabeth Marks knew that her real name was Warren, and that she was, in sooth, the wife of the redoubtable Magsman; and these facts she might blurt forth in the presence of Grumley. Nay, more, she might even proclaim Mrs. Brace's complicity in the escape of the Magsman from Newgate; and thus the reputation, the honour, and even the personal safety of the unhappy milliner would be so completely in the power of the Bow Street officer that she would not dare return a negative to any favour he might ask of a tender nature, or any extortion he might practise in a pecuniary point of view.

Nor did Mr. Grumley fail to observe the stupor of consternation which seized upon Mrs. Brace the moment her eyes encountered the Gallows' Widow; and even if he had not noticed any such emotion on the part of the milliner, he

could not have failed, from the mere fact of the visit of such a woman as Elizabeth Marks, to draw inferences by no means favourable to her private character.

"Well, this is a most extraordinary interruption to a wery pleasant little conversation which you and me, ma'am, was having together," said the Bow Street officer, winking his eye with a half-amorous and half-malicious significancy at Mrs. Brace.

"Of what offence is this young woman accused?" demanded the milliner, summoning to her aid all her mental courage and firmness.

"It's well knowed, ma'am," replied the constable, still retaining his hold upon the prisoner, "that she's long been in connection with a desperate set of fellows; and there's three or four things I can bring for'ard against her. But I don't want to be too hard upon her, and so I shall only accuse her of having aided and abetted in the escape of one Joe Warren from Newgate —"

"He picks out that offence, ma'am," interrupted the Gallows' Widow, darting a look of mingled hatred and contempt upon the constable, "because there's a reward of fifty guineas offered for the apprehension of the woman who intimidated and overawed the household of old Shrubsole, the picture-dealer, on the night when Joseph Warren performed the feat that has made his name as famous as Jack Sheppard's. And that woman for whom fifty guineas are offered —"

"Is yourself, Lizzy Marks," exclaimed Grumley; "and so you need not attempt to deny it."

"On the contrary, I glory in it," rejoined the Gallows' Widow. "But take care of yourself, Mr. Grumley. It will prove in the long run an evil day for you when you began to make war upon the band to which I belong."

"We shall see all about that, my dear," observed the constable, in a tone of self-satisfaction. "Come, now, let us be off."

"Mrs. Brace," exclaimed the Gallows' Widow, "pay this fellow fifty guineas, and he will let me go."

"Not I, indeed!" ejaculated Grumley.

"Yes, but you will, though," returned Elizabeth Marks. "Mrs. Brace, you know that I can speak out about certain things if I like —"

"Silence, woman!" ejaculated the milliner, in a tone that was rather hysterically sharp than imperiously prompt. "Mr. Grumley," she immediately said, turning toward the constable, "I should wish to avoid the scandal that will be entailed upon my establishment by the exposure of the fact that this woman was arrested while paying a visit to me. At the same time," added Mrs. Brace, "I would not have you think that I am in any way intimidated — "

"Well, well," exclaimed the constable, perceiving the smile of mingled malice and triumph which slowly wreathed the lips of the Gallows' Widow, "I see that it would be unpleasant if the world was to know that Elizabeth Marks, alias the Gallows' Widow, was on such familiar terms of intimacy with Mrs. Brace, the fashionable dressmaker of Pall Mall, that she could introduce herself at all hours into her friend's presence."

The milliner listened in dismay to this speech, which the constable delivered in a measured and significant tone; for it was as much as to intimate that he, Peter Grumley, had now got her, the fashionable milliner, completely into his power. And Elizabeth Marks, whose natural keenness enabled her to perceive that some compromise was about to be suggested by the Bow Street officer in her behalf, chuckled with that species of low, inward laugh which invariably sounded ominous and made the blood run cold, no matter on whose ears it fell.

"Yes," resumed Mr. Grumley, after a brief pause during which he watched with satisfaction the effect that his previous speech had produced upon the milliner, "it would be unpleasant for the world to know that the Gallows' Widow was on such intimate terms in Pall Mall; and the magistrate might even think it necessary to send for Mrs. Brace and demand explanations on that point."

"Enough, enough, Mr. Grumley," ejaculated the wretched milliner. "Name the conditions upon which you will suffer this woman to take her departure."

"And you will comply with 'em?" demanded the officer, interrogatively.

"She will not dare refuse," said the Gallows' Widow, in that quiet tone which actually imparted to the observation more weight and a deeper meaning than if it had been uttered with ejaculatory excitement.

" Speak, sir, be quick, and let us put an end to this scene," said Mrs. Brace, trembling all over and speaking in a voice that was painfully agitated, despite the desperate efforts which she made to preserve her self-possession; but every look which was darted upon her by either Grumley or the Gallows' Widow, and every word which fell from their mouths, carried with a more poignant intensity to the soul of the miserable woman the harrowing conviction that she was utterly and totally in the power of both.

" Madam," observed Elizabeth Marks, again speaking in her quiet manner, " it is very evident from what Mr. Grumley has said that he is disposed to assent to a compromise on my behalf, and therefore any delay which arises will be caused only by you."

" That's true enough," exclaimed the Bow Street officer. " And now for the conditions that I have to propose."

" Speak! " ejaculated Mrs. Brace, with a nervous irritability which showed how tensely her feelings were strung.

" In the first place," said Grumley, " you will pay me, ma'am, the fifty guineas which I lose by letting this young 'ooman escape me."

" Agreed! " exclaimed the milliner. " What next? "

" And you will consent," rejoined the constable, " to the little favour I was asking you just at the very moment when the servant came into the room to announce the Gallows' Widow."

The lascivious twinkling of Grumley's eyes and the blush of indignation and shame which all in a moment overspread the countenance of Mrs. Brace revealed to the keen perception and far-sighted experience of Elizabeth Marks the nature of the favour to which allusion had just been made; and the expression of mingled satire, malicious glee, and subdued astonishment which instantaneously appeared upon the woman's pale features, struck the milliner in her turn, making her aware that the Gallows' Widow had penetrated into the nature of the constable's pretensions.

" My God! " almost screamed forth the wretched milliner, her feelings now goaded to the verge of desperation, " would that I were dead — dead! "

And she repeated the word with a frightful emphasis.

" Compose yourself, madam," said Elizabeth Marks, with

characteristic coolness. "You cannot now accuse Mr. Grumley of protracting this unpleasant scene."

"Let us put an end to it at once," exclaimed Mrs. Brace, now speaking with the firmness of one who has suddenly taken a desperate resolution. "Mr. Grumley, I agree to the conditions."

"Capital!" ejaculated the officer; and he released the hold which throughout this scene he had retained upon his captive.

"I thank you, madam, for having purchased my freedom," said the Gallows' Widow, but speaking in a tone of quiet and subdued satire instead of gratitude. "The business which brought me here to-night is of no great importance. I merely wanted a little money; but as you have so generously undertaken to pay the fifty guineas to this cormorant constable, I shall not ask you for any more, especially as, in your anxiety to serve me, you have agreed to another condition which, I see full well, is by no means palatable. However," added Elizabeth Marks, suffering the irony of her tone to become more apparent, "when the fashionable, exquisite, and elegant milliner of Pall Mall contemptuously designated me as 'that woman,' she did not foresee how fully and completely she herself was destined to be humiliated in the presence of the very female whom she thus scorned, loathed, and despised. Farewell, madam, and may you pass a pleasant night."

With these words the Gallows' Widow quitted the room, her low, chuckling laugh sounding with a species of sepulchral omen upon the ears of Mrs. Brace, who, already crushed and overwhelmed by the withering satire which had been levelled at her, sank half-fainting into the nearest chair.

CHAPTER XXX

THE GLASS OF LIQUEUR

TEN minutes had elapsed since the departure of the Gallows' Widow, and a profound silence reigned throughout the milliner's establishment in Pall Mall.

The door of the parlour was now opened cautiously, and Mrs. Brace came forth, holding a light in her hand, and followed by Peter Grumley.

The countenance of the unhappy woman was of a ghastly pallor, which, as before stated, showed through the roseate tint which art had shed upon her cheeks; but in the settled frown stamped on her forehead, the corrugated brows, the fixed stare of the eyes, the compressed lips, and the upheaved, motionless bosom, there was evinced a sternness of purpose which would have filled the constable's mind with terrible misgivings had not his brain become confused with a large potation of brandy wherein he had indulged immediately after the departure of the Gallows' Widow. His countenance was therefore flushed, his eyes were bloodshot, and his lips were wreathed into a vacant smile of drunken satisfaction and tipsy triumph, his appearance thus presenting a remarkable contrast with that of the determined and desperate woman who now conducted him as cautiously as she could up the staircase to her own bedchamber.

But the carpeted stairs creaked beneath the heavy and uneven steps of the constable, and his bulky form occasionally reeled against the balustrade, thereby producing a cracking sound in the woodwork; and in rapid, low, but severe, nay, almost savage whispers, did Mrs. Brace enjoin him to be careful how he alarmed and aroused the entire household.

At length the chamber was reached, and Mr. Peter Grumley

was introduced into that temple of voluptuousness whither the milliner was wont at times to admit her favoured elect.

Throwing himself upon a chair, the constable cast his eyes around the chamber, every feature of which he surveyed with that semi-vacancy which characterizes the looks of a man who has taken a drop too much; but when his eyes settled upon the downy bed, with its linen of snowy whiteness and its pillows soft and luxurious even to the view, all the fury of his animal passions rekindled with consuming ardour.

Rising from his seat, he caught the milliner in his arms, and, straining her in his uncouth embrace, he pressed his parched and heated lips to her own. Then, resuming the chair, he forced her to sit upon his knees.

"You are uncommon handsome, my dear," he murmured, in a voice rendered more than naturally thick and hoarse by the desires which were devouring him; "and I knowed you wouldn't play the cruel when once we came to a good understanding together."

"You seem to be thirsty, your lips are dry, your tongue is parched," said Mrs. Brace, who had thus far abandoned herself to the odious toyings of the constable because it suited her purpose to appear thus docile, calm, and resigned.

"Well, I am athirst," he responded, rolling his feverish tongue over his cracking lips.

"I have wine, spirits, and liqueurs in that cupboard," said the milliner, gently disengaging herself from his arms and rearranging the corsage of her dress.

"You're exceedin' kind, my dear," observed Grumley, fixing upon her his looks of the grossest, most brutal lasciviousness. "Suppose you give me a little wine and water fust, to squench this terrible thirst; and then I'll take a sip of — what d'ye call them last things you spoke of?"

"Liqueurs," responded the milliner, whose manner was glacial and passionless as her tone was cold and meaningless. "Here are curaçoa, noyau, golden water, and Dantzic brandy."

"Well, my dear, I leave it all to you to choose me a glass of the best of them stuffs," returned the constable, "for I can't say as how I ever tasted any of them. So let us have the wine and water fust, the what-d'ye-call-it next, and then to bed in a jiffy."

Mrs. Brace opened the cupboard and speedily mixed a tumbler of sherry and cold water, which she handed to the constable. She then returned to the cupboard, where she remained for nearly a minute; and, on accosting Grumley again, she held in her hand a small glass filled with noyau, the almond flavour of which was diffused through the chamber.

"How beautiful that smells!" exclaimed Mr. Grumley, placing upon a table the tumbler which he had drained and receiving the liqueur-glass from the milliner's plump white hand.

"Noyau always has the perfume of almonds," she observed; and her lips, which were now ashy white, quivered slightly.

"Your health, my love," said the constable, raising his eyes and the glass at the same time.

"I am your slave for this night, according to agreement," returned the milliner, taking off her coquettish French cap.

"You look handsomer than ever," exclaimed the constable. "Once more, my love, here's to your health."

And Peter Grumley tossed the noyau down his capacious throat.

But during the instant that elapsed while his countenance was thus upturned and the glass was at his lips, he caught a glimpse of the features of Mrs. Brace, and it struck him that an expression of fiendish malignity and diabolical triumph had suddenly sprung up thereon.

This thought was as rapid as the lightning is vivid; and it was the last which ever flashed through the brain of the Bow Street officer.

For even as the liqueur was gliding with its luscious smoothness and oily richness down his throat, the glass fell from his hand, a strong spasm shot through his whole frame, and life was already extinct as he toppled for a moment on his chair ere he rolled a heavy corpse upon the carpet.

For nearly a minute did Mrs. Brace stand gazing upon the body of that man whom she had thus sacrificed to her feelings of abhorrence in respect to the present and of terror with regard to the future; for it was not so much to escape his loathsome embraces of this night that she had murdered him, as to save herself from becoming his victim at every

hour and at every moment when it might suit his fantasy and please his lustful inclinations thereafter.

Yes, for nearly a minute did she gaze upon the form which was so lately endowed with a robust and vigorous health, and which now lay like a mere bundle of clothes at her feet. No, not exactly like anything so little calculated to inspire emotions of terror; for the ghastly countenance of death, was it not there?

Oh, yes; and now an awful consternation began to grow upon the wretched woman, and the clock of St. James's Church suddenly struck one, as if to remind her with that solemn sound, and at that solemn hour, that she was alone in her chamber with the corpse of her murdered victim.

Then, oh, then, how bitterly, deeply, profoundly did she repent of the act which she had perpetrated, — not so much on account of the enormity of the crime itself, but because it appeared to have suddenly raised up in her path a thousand embarrassments of a magnitude which she could not see any possibility of surmounting. Oh, better, better far would it have been, she now thought, to surrender herself to the loathsome embraces of the wretch, and even incur every chance and every risk of having to prostitute herself to him in the same way wherever it should suit his caprice and his fancy for the future. Yes, better were it to have become the slave of his beastly lusts and the victim of his odious passions altogether, rather than to have taken the one tremendous step which could not be recalled, and which in a moment, as it were, placed her within view of the black and looming scaffold.

Such were her reflections, but, great Heaven! how useless now! For there, at her feet, on the carpet of her own bed-chamber, lay the corpse of the murdered man.

For an instant she thought of committing suicide; but her soul sickened at the idea of self-destruction. And yet the means were ready at hand, for there was still left a large dose of Prussic acid in that phial whence she had poured a few drops into the fatal glass of noyau. Yes, the means were ready, the inclination even prompted, but the courage was wanting to complete all the elements necessary for the appalling tragedy of suicide.

And yet what was to be done? The corpse was there, and it must be disposed of. But where could it be concealed?

where buried? And was Mrs. Brace able to adopt any decisive step without assistance? No, it was impossible; and the wretched woman, seating herself upon a chair, covered her face with her hands and gave way to all the bitterness of her harrowing reflections.

Alone with a corpse! This was the appalling conviction that was uppermost in her mind. In a few minutes she felt a cold shudder, a glacial tremor, stealing over her; and it struck her disordered fancy that some terrible phantom had risen slowly and noiselessly up before her and was gazing upon her with its dull, glassy, lustreless eyes. Then she abruptly removed her hands from her countenance; and her looks, wild with apprehension, were cast swiftly around the room, settling irresistibly at length upon the corpse that lay stretched on the floor.

The murderess started to her feet. Was she the sport of some horrible vision, the victim of some hideous nightmare, or was it really true that she had killed a human being, and that the corpse was there, at her feet? Once more she carried her hands to her head, but it was not this time to cover her face; no, it was to press her fingers to her throbbing brows and thereby steady her thoughts, if possible. For her brain, oh, it reeled, it reeled; and those thoughts, oh, they whirled, they whirled; and it seemed as if her scalp had been torn off and some demon was pouring molten lead upon the palpitating, seething, quivering cerebral mass. Just Heaven! her punishment had already begun on earth, and the red right arm of God was already stretched out to avenge that foul and atrocious murder.

Alone with the corpse of her victim! Oh, this was the conviction that hemmed her in with an adamantine wall, and imbued with its own harrowing influence all the thoughts which swept through her brain and all the emotions which rolled their tidal fury through her breast. Was it possible that she could have been so mad, so insane, so rabid, so foolish, as to perpetrate a deed which thus conjured up a myriad perils to environ her, as if with a host of insatiate demons panting for her destruction, her ruin, her blood? But, hark! what sound was that which made her start so convulsively? Was it a guttural moan from the throat of the corpse at her feet? Was it the wail of the restless spirit which had only been parted a few minutes from its mortal

tenement? Or was it the voice of some unearthly being responding in mockery or in sympathy to that tremendous eloquence of silent anguish and noiseless despair which filled the heart of the murderess? She listened, all was still, a profound tranquillity reigned throughout the house; and in her own chamber it was indeed the stupendous silence of death.

Her imagination, then, had deceived her, and no sound had in reality reached her ears. But this stillness, this silence, oh, it was now becoming intolerable. It was something which began to weigh upon her heart like lead, it was not a mere absence of sound, it was the presence of an influence too mysterious to describe and too tremendous to endure. Oh, it seemed as if everything were now sepulchral that met her eyes in the yellow lustre of the night-lamp. She looked toward the bed; its snowy whiteness appalled her, for it appeared as if she were gazing on her own winding-sheet. She turned her eyes toward the windows; the drapery seemed to have a dark, funereal gloom. Her looks dwelt for an instant on a tall, narrow clothes-press of dark mahogany, and her fevered fancy represented it as an upright case containing skeletons. Once more her eyes turned wildly toward the casement, and there were they riveted with dread horror; for it appeared to the appalled imagination of the unhappy woman that between the opening of the window-curtains she beheld the marble countenance of a corpse looking in upon her. For nearly a minute did Mrs. Brace maintain her eyes fixed, in awful consternation, upon that phantom of her brain's creation; and all the while her tongue was locked as if by paralysis, and her limbs were deprived of motion, and she was like a statue that could feel! But at length her terror reached that point when she must either scream out or avert her eyes, and it was this latter species of relief which she was enabled to grant unto her own agonizing soul. And then, oh, horror! as she suddenly and shudderingly withdrew her looks from the ideal face of the dead at the window, they fell upon the real one which seemed to gaze up at her with its fixed and stony eyes as the corpse lay stretched upon the carpet.

A moan of indescribable anguish now burst from the lips of the wretched woman; and once more did she cover her countenance with her hands, to shut out the appalling object

from her view. But during the few moments that she thus veiled her physical vision, her feverish fancy acquired ten thousand times more activity than ever, and her imagination conjured up myriads of frightful shapes and terrific forms to harrow her with all the dread phantasmagoria of the grave. Then, unable to endure this exquisite refinement of torture, she opened her eyes again, and again did they irresistibly settle upon the face of that corpse with which she was thus alone.

Goaded almost to madness, feeling that her senses were abandoning her, and yet not daring to fly from the room nor to summon assistance, the miserable woman once more caught eagerly at the idea of suicide which flashed back into her heated brain; and, rushing to the cupboard, she was about to seize upon the phial of Prussic acid, when her unquiet conscience made her fling a startled glance to her right and to her left as she was about to commit this new crime. And then, with an ineffable aggravation of all the horror which previously filled her soul, did she suddenly become transfixed to the spot, while her entire frame grew all in a moment paralyzed and petrified; for the furtive look which she had thrown around was arrested once again by the phantom face that her disordered imagination depicted as gazing in upon her through the window.

So strong was the delusion that during the minute which elapsed while Mrs. Brace was thus held in statue-like thraldom, unable to stir a limb, unable to give utterance to a sound, unable also to withdraw her eyes from that object of terrible attraction, during this minute of an appalling fascination, we say, her mind exercised an activity and an inventiveness which only added to the horrors of her thoughts and enhanced the poignancy of her mental excruciation. For the face which thus seemed to be looking in upon her took all the ghastly lineaments of the grave: its flesh was of that yellowish white which marks the corpse, its eyes were fixed with stony, lustreless, and yet not altogether inexpressive glare, its black brows were strongly pencilled above the deep cavernous sockets wherein the glassy orbs were set, and the lips were thin and of a bluish pallor. All these characteristics did the horror-stricken woman behold, or, rather, fancy that she beheld; for the entire portraiture, with its supernal vividness, was nothing more than the

offspring of her own disordered fancy. But at length, unable any longer to endure the contemplation of an object which to her had all the appearance and produced all the effects of the sternest reality, she burst, as it were, from the moral tetanus which held her spellbound; and, clapping her hands frantically to her throbbing brows, she gave utterance to a hollow moan and sank upon the carpet.

CHAPTER XXXI

A NIGHT WITH A MURDERED MAN

THE lamp which stood upon the table immediately began to grow dim, as if a mist were perceptibly rising around it. Steadily did that dimness increase every moment, until the light was subdued down into the faint glimmer of a distant star, and then it expired altogether, leaving the chamber involved in the blackest darkness.

And upon the floor the milliner was stretched, under the influence of an irresistible rigidity which retained her spell-bound from the hair of her head to the soles of her feet. An appalling consternation was upon her, and yet she could not move a muscle nor give vent to a sound. Her mouth was fast closed as with lockjaw; and the same dreadful species of tetanus held all her limbs in its iron prisonage, leaving to every fibre and tendon the acuteness of feeling and to every sense its peculiar faculty, but suspending all motion, and reducing the woman to the condition of an animated statue.

Yes, but a statue animated with a vitality as fresh and a perception as vivid as if not a single function nor physical power were held in abeyance; and thus everything which might happen to the miserable being while in this state was certain to be characterized by a tremendous aggravation of concomitant feeling. Complete and effectual as was the physical restraint, so acute and keen was the moral perception; and the moment Mrs. Brace became aware that she was reduced to this awful position, she likewise found herself enveloped in a darkness so pitchy that it seemed to be a black mist filling the atmosphere with its stifling density.

All that had passed during the earlier portion of the night she recollected well; and slowly, nay, even methodically, did she revolve in her memory the various incidents which

had so terribly marked those hours. At length she reached, as it were, the end of her reflections, that appalling term reminding her that she was now alone in the room with the corpse of the murdered man.

Yes, upon this tremendous truth did her thoughts settle; and she said within herself, " The dead body lies upon the same carpet where I am stretched. It is only a few feet distant, and if I could stretch out my arm I should touch it with my hand. But Heaven forbid that I should seek thus to come in contact with it, even were I able to move a member or a limb. And, oh, horror! if the corpse itself were to extend its arm — "

The wretched milliner stopped short in her reflections, which had suddenly become too soul-harrowing to permit a continuance; and over her entire frame, so rigid and statue-like, a glacial shudder passed. But it was not she who moved convulsively beneath the influence of this shudder; no, it was the icy tremor which rolled slowly over her, with the clammy sensation produced by the contact of a loathsome snake.

Entombed, as it were, in the midst of that stupendous darkness, stretched helpless, motionless, and voiceless upon the carpet, with all her powers of perception, feeling, and endurance more vividly awake and more acutely susceptible than ever she had known them before, and having upon her mind the astounding conviction that within a few feet of her there was the corpse of the man whom she herself had murdered, was not such a position enough to deprive the miserable woman of reason and blast her intellect with the searing lightning of madness all in a moment?

But, no, it was not within the range of her destiny that she should experience relief even in the dark mazes of mental aberration; and thus the weight of consternation crushed not at one moment, and the poignancy of anguish rent not reason's powers at another, although tremendous indeed was the trial to which the strength of the woman's intellect was put by those rapid and torturing alternations.

How long she had lain in that position, she knew not; what hour of the night it was, she could not surmise. Nor was she able to form the least conjecture as to the cause which held her thus spellbound. She was not circled by cords nor chains; for, if she were, she would feel the bonds upon

her person, and, moreover, she would be at least enabled to move her limbs somewhat. But not a hair's breadth could she stir them, not a hair's breadth could she turn her head either to the right or to the left. And what was more wondrous still, her eyes were wide open, and the lids did not wink.

The tetanus was thus complete; but whence did it arise? Was it from some infernal spell, some diabolical incantation, or was it the forewarning of the awful visitation of God's wrath upon her? These conjectures were as bewildering as their nature was soul-harrowing; and every instant was laden with thoughts the anguish of which was sufficient to expand throughout a whole century of existence and fill it with an unceasing woe.

Again and again did the miserable woman reflect that she was alone in that chamber with the corpse of the murdered man; and again and again did she think within herself that if the same miraculous and incomprehensible power which had reduced her to so helpless a condition of thraldom should inspire that dead body with the motion, the power, and the will to harm or to terrify her, she must lie still and endure that crowning horror, for not a finger could she raise in her defence, not a sound could she articulate to summon assistance.

For the fiftieth time these excruciating reflections passed athwart the milliner's imagination, as if a long iron wire armed with a myriad little sharp blades were dragged slowly through her brain, cutting its ferocious way amidst the very quick of the vital mass; yes, for the fiftieth time had she endured the crucifixion of those lancinating thoughts, when a church clock proclaimed the hour of three.

Thrice spoke the iron tongue of time, and the sound carried the cold sensation of the tomb to the heart of the milliner. She knew not why it was, but the announcement of that hour appeared pregnant with awful omen to the mind of that miserable woman. More dread, more solemn, more sepulchral than before was the stillness which succeeded the striking of the clock; it was the profound tranquillity of the grave, the stupendous silence of the tomb.

But, oh, horror! what sound is that which now reaches the ears of Mrs. Brace and carries an ice-bolt to her heart? It is the rustling of a garment, the slight, faint, and scarcely

audible noise produced by a human being slowly turning upon a carpet. And that sound came from within a few feet of the horror-stricken woman, ay, from the very direction in which the corpse lay.

To say that she listened with breathless attention were to inspire the idea that she had power over her respiration; whereas, this faculty had remained miraculously suspended from the instant that the tetanus commenced, her bosom never rising or sinking once the whole time, but resting stationary and pulseless like the bust of a marble statue. Had not the breath, however, been thus suspended under the influence of the miraculous trance, it would assuredly have become so, and the blood would have turned to ice in the milliner's veins as that rustling sound stole gradually, gradually, gradually upon her ears.

Conceive that woman chained, as it were, to the ground by the invisible and impalpable but not less adamantine bonds of a tremendous torpor which locked up the physical powers only, and left the moral perceptions to acquire a more poignant keenness from this total release of their allegiance to the substantial being; conceive her, we say, thus lying stretched upon her back as powerless and as helpless as if she were made of stone, and yet alive, oh, God knows how painfully, acutely alive to every circumstance and every influence in any way affecting her; conceive her in this appalling position, with the harrowing conviction slowly, steadily, and surely stealing into her soul that the corpse of the murdered man was not only moving, but was actually creeping toward her.

Talk of the horrors of churchyards by night, talk of the hideous spectres which throng over the grave of the suicide in the cross-road, talk of the ghastly shapes which crowd around the gibbet to which the bleaching bones of the murderer hang, talk of the overwhelming terrors of the nightmare, and all these, even when combined together, would fall far short in furnishing an adequate idea of the harrowing nature of those feelings which now took possession of the miserable murderess.

Was it possible that the man had only been in a fit and had come back to life? No, this hypothesis was absurd, for the dose of poison was sufficient to kill a dozen men as powerful and as full of vigorous health as he; and, more-

over, had he not fallen from his chair as if suddenly struck by lightning, and had not she seen his corpselike countenance fixed rigidly in death, ere the lamp had been so mysteriously extinguished?

Then, holy God! was it possible that new life had been infused into the dead man? Had the terrible anticipation of the milliner been signally and awfully fulfilled, and was the corpse endowed with the motion, the power, and the will either to harm or to affright her? Yes, all this was possible, as possible, she felt assured, as that she herself could be thus invisibly enchained and thus stretched motionless and powerless on the carpet by some miraculous and superhuman spell.

But while these thoughts were whirling through her brain, the rustling sound, that awful indication of the movement of the dead, was approaching nearer and nearer. Had it been a serpent winding its way toward her, and forcing upon her active imagination all the horrors of its undulating coils and slimy touch, the effect would not have been half so appalling as was this preternatural, gradient, yet steady and persevering progress of a corpse through the black darkness which filled the chamber.

Fearful as was the consternation which now sat upon the soul of Mrs. Brace, and harrowed as her feelings were, she nevertheless had clearness and vigour of perception sufficient to mark every characteristic, no matter how trivial, of the astounding incident that was now taking place. Thus, her ear becoming accustomed to the rustling sound, she was enabled to form a conjecture of the precise nature of the motion which the body must be undergoing in order to produce that exact noise; and she came to the conclusion that the corpse was being moved, or was moving itself, whichever it might be, flat along the carpet upon its back.

For five minutes did this awful portion of the supernatural drama last, five mortal minutes, each appearing to be a century, and each to contain the essence of whole ages of excruciating torture. At length the wretched woman became aware that the corpse was close beside her; and yet not a hair's breadth could she recoil from the coming contact, not the distance of a pin's point could she move a limb away. The natural impulse of an agonizing horror was to contract her entire form even within herself, as it

were; but this faculty was denied her, so strong, so insuperable was the magic spell thrown upon her by the tetanus.

And now came the awful moment, a moment more fully fraught with undiluted horror than even that when the culprit upon the gallows feels the trap-door slipping away beneath his feet, or when the sailor who has fallen overboard in the southern seas hears the gush of the shark through the water close behind him. Such a moment was it, nay, a more harrowing one still, we affirm, that had now arrived in the existence of Mrs. Brace, — the moment when she felt the first marble-cold touch of the hand of the corpse.

And her own hand was it that thus experienced the initiative contact, her own right hand, which lay by her side as powerless and as completely petrified, so far as motion was concerned, as all the rest of her body. Slowly, slowly did the corpse pass its cold, cold hand over that of the milliner, who shuddered inwardly, but without contracting her form in any way or to the slightest degree. That shudder was a sensation, and not a movement; a feeling, and not a real tremor.

From her own hand the hand of the corpse passed slowly up her arm, which was naked to a little above the elbow; and as the touch of the dead traced its way by very slow degrees over her own plump flesh, she could feel the animal heat in herself gradually retiring beneath the appalling contact which she was thus doomed to experience. Was it not, oh, was it not hell upon earth, and had not her punishment already begun in this world with a foretaste of the horrors of Satan's kingdom?

Though she recoiled, as it were, within herself from this atrocious penance, though she revolted with a rending anguish against so diabolical a torture, yet did she remain in a condition of utter inability to make any real or effectual movement. Not to a hair's breadth could she shift her position; a living statue was she.

And now over the upper portion of her dress passed the heavy cold hand of the corpse, and on to her bosom was continued the loathsome, terrible contact. At the same time that the presence of the dead was thus upon the ample, firm, and exuberant contours which had so often heaved in amorous sport and so frequently pillowed the head of some favoured lover, at the same moment, we say, that the

hand of the corpse thus slowly began to wander over the luxuriant globe that palpitated no longer in wanton enjoyment, but was motionless as the breast of the marble statue, at the same instant was it the horrified woman became aware that the dead body of the murdered man was still drawing itself closer and closer to her side.

And then it really appeared to her as if a scream rose up to the very tip of her tongue, but was stopped by the closed portals formed by her compressed lips; and thus still did her mortal anguish continue to grow the more excruciating from her utter inability to give expression to it.

From her bosom the hand passed slowly, ah! and with a revolting touch, like that of a slimy serpent, along the neck of the tortured woman, as she thus lay motionless on the floor. Over her chin went the hand, then it passed gradiently upon her left cheek, and all this while the corpse was drawing close up to her right side. At length the hand quitted her countenance, and the arm wound itself by degrees about her neck, the dead body turning itself toward her the while.

And now the corpse raised itself sufficiently to stoop over and place its cold countenance in contact with the cheek of the milliner; and the arm that circled her neck appeared to press her lovingly. O Heaven! who can describe the hideousness, the revolting loathsomeness, the mortal horror of that unnatural embrace? But, as if the cup of gall and filth and abomination should be filled even to the overflowing, as if there should be nothing required to render this monstrous drama as complete in all its details as possible, and as if this foretaste of posthumous punishment were to be crowned with all the horrors conceivable by mortal imagination, the corpse slowly, but surely and resolutely, glued its lips to the mouth of the milliner and sent with its awful caress an ice-chill throughout her whole frame.

The powers of human endurance were now tested to the extreme, the strength of the human intellect was tried to the last degree. A terrible revulsion ensued all in a moment; the limbs of the woman recovered their power of movement, her jaws were unlocked, and with a cry of mingled horror and anguish she started up.

The light of morning was streaming in between the curtains; and as the milliner cast her eyes wildly around her,

they encountered the face of Peter Grumley's corpse, lying precisely in the same spot and in the same position as when it had fallen from the chair.

Then Mrs. Brace knew that she had been labouring under the influence of a horrible nightmare, a long dream made up of such frightful incidents that the memory thereof must inevitably follow her to the grave, even should her life extend to the uttermost stretch of human existence.

The truth was that when she had sunk down upon the carpet under the influence of the terror caused by the belief that she beheld the countenance of a corpse at the window, the partial fit which had thus seized upon her yielded to the effects of utter exhaustion of mind and body, and a deep slumber fell upon her eyes. No marvel, then, was it if the dread tragedy of the night haunted her in the dreams which accompanied her sleep; and the frightful activity of her disordered fancy displayed its power in the appalling vision which we have detailed so minutely.

But though now released from the terrors of that shocking nightmare, Mrs. Brace still found herself in the presence of the tremendous embarrassment which her crime had created. She looked at her watch; it was half-past six o'clock in the morning. The night was gone, and nothing was done to dispose of the corpse. Such was her reflection; and then came the maddening conviction that she could not possibly make away with it unless by the assistance of one or more of her domestics. But to place herself in their power — ah! better have remained at the mercy of Peter Grumley and have been spared the remorse and the dangers attendant upon the crime of murder.

But what was she to do? How was she to act? It was useless to repine any more; the past could not be recalled, and it became imperiously necessary to adopt measures for the security of the future. Upon the body she stood gazing for some minutes while these thoughts passed through her mind; and she no longer experienced any feelings of terror, for it is not by daylight that murderers are afraid.

But what was she to do? A hundred times in a minute did she ask herself this question, and no satisfactory answer could she give. At length she reasoned with herself that nothing could now be done for some hours, that she must conceal the corpse as well as she could until the next night

and in the meantime there would be ample leisure to resolve upon the most prudent course to be then adopted.

Having thus succeeded in looking at her position with more calmness and deliberation than she had hitherto been enabled to call to her assistance from the moment the Bow Street officer fell a corpse at her feet, the milliner resolved to conceal the body in her bathroom adjoining. She, however, found it no easy task to drag so huge a mass into that place; but at length she accomplished this task, and, locking the door, she felt that she could begin to breathe more freely.

She now hastened to lay aside her garments, which she had worn all night; but when she approached the mirror, she recoiled in horror and dismay at the ghastly countenance that was reflected therein. And yet those features were her own, and it was no spectral face which looked at her through the medium of that glass.

But, great Heaven! what an effect had this one night of suffering, terror, guilt, and anguish produced upon the milliner! Her eyes were sunken and hollow, her lips were livid, her face was cadaverous where the rouge lay not upon it, and upon the cheeks that paint added to the ghastliness of her looks.

"This will not do," murmured Mrs. Brace to herself. "My appearance will excite the strangest suspicions. Nothing but my accustomed bath will effectually revive me."

And to take this bath it was necessary to return into the place whither she had dragged the corpse; but as the beams of morning grew brighter within the rooms, all superstitious terrors evaporated from the milliner's breast. She accordingly laid aside her apparel, entered the bathroom, threw a cloth over the countenance of the dead body, and indulged in her wonted immersion in cold water.

On issuing from the bathroom, she once more locked the door carefully; and, contemplating herself in the glass, murmured in a tone of mingled triumph and satisfaction, "The night I have passed was terrible, terrible; but it has not left a trace which the world's eye shall observe."

The milliner then proceeded with her toilet; and in half an hour she descended to the apartment where her young ladies were assembled for breakfast.

And no one could possibly have imagined nor would even have believed, if informed of the fact, that within the

previous eight hours Mrs. Brace had not only committed a murder but had passed every moment of that period alone with the corpse of her victim.

And who that passed by the house that morning and saw all the usual preparations being made for the commercial business of the day, the shop windows decked out with bonnets of the newest shape, caps of the most coquettish fashion, and lace collars of the most costly species, and then, glancing into the shop itself, that bevy of charming young women all wearing so modest a demeanour and all attired with such exquisite neatness, who, we ask, that thus beheld the establishment of Mrs. Brace that morn, could have possibly suspected that there was the corpse of a murdered man in the house?

CHAPTER XXXII

THE BARONET AND THE ROYAL MAIDEN

We must take a temporary leave of Mrs. Brace, inasmuch as before we can continue the thread of her adventures there is an episode of interest and importance which must be duly woven into our narrative.

The scene shifts to the environs of Windsor, where Sir Richard Stamford was occupying furnished apartments in a comfortable but secluded dwelling kept by a worthy old couple who never troubled themselves about other people's business. There were no other lodgers in the house; and thus the baronet not only enjoyed the retirement which was so necessary to tranquillize a mind that had passed through so much torturing excitement, but he was likewise free from any of that episonage or impertinent observation which any peculiarity of habits usually entails upon the individual who establishes his quarters in a provincial town.

It was about noon on the day following that fearful night the incidents of which have occupied the preceding chapter; and Sir Richard Stamford was seated in the parlour at his lodging, busily engaged in the perusal of some letters which he had just received from his solicitor at Aylesbury. The contents appeared to give him satisfaction; and it was even with an expression of mingled joy and triumph upon his countenance that he glanced from time to time at the totals presented by two long columns of figures on a balance-sheet that lay spread out before him.

In the midst of this occupation he was interrupted by a gentle knock at the door of his apartment; and having desired the individual to enter, he sprang from his seat with an ejaculation of mingled delight and astonishment on beholding the Princess Amelia.

Her Royal Highness was attired with an elegant simplicity which became her style of beauty far more advantageously than the richest apparel gemmed with precious stones. The modest gipsy-hat enhanced the air of winning softness and sweet amiability which characterized her countenance; and the rich contours of her full, voluptuous form were developed rather than concealed by the plain dress which fitted closely to her fine, luxuriant shape.

The smile that wreathed her lips parted them so as to display the teeth of dazzling whiteness; and her cheeks wore the healthy glow of virginal freshness that had deepened with the rapid walk which the royal lady had taken through the park.

"Beautiful princess!" exclaimed Sir Richard Stamford, throwing himself upon his knees before her and pressing to his lips the hand which she extended toward him, "how can I sufficiently testify my gratitude for this honour, this unexpected pleasure?"

"If you mean to regard my visit as an honour, Sir Richard," said the princess, "you will at once invest it with a cold formality which will destroy all the meaning and significance which I had wished to impart to it. In a word, it was as a friend that I came to see you."

"And as my good genius, my guardian angel, do I welcome you," cried the baronet, again pressing Amelia's hand to his lips. Then, rising from his knees and gently conducting her to a seat, he placed himself by her side, saying, "This is the happiest moment I have known for a long, long time, and far happier than I had ever hoped to experience again."

"Now you speak in a manner which gives me pleasure," said the princess; but, feeling that a blush was rapidly overspreading her countenance, she hastened to observe, "We have pledged a lasting and indestructible friendship to each other, and it was this sentiment which prompted me to take a step that under other circumstances would be improper and inconsistent to a degree. Tell me, therefore, that you do not think less of me for having intruded myself upon your privacy; tell me that I have not suffered in your estimation."

"Oh, my dearest friend, for such you have permitted me to call you, and such you have indeed proved yourself,"

exclaimed the baronet, surveying the princess with a species of holy adoration in which there was nought gross nor sensual, "how is it possible that you can ask me if I be offended by this crowning proof of your kindness toward me? When we have walked together for hours in the park and the wind has been too cold for you to sit down to rest yourself, I should have besought you to bless my humble dwelling with your presence if only for a few minutes; but I was fearful of giving offence. And yet I have felt at the time how happy I should be if you were to cross the threshold of this apartment where I pass so many hours alone — thinking of you," he added, in a tone of deep and fervid emotion.

"Then I am glad that I have on this occasion obeyed the sudden fancy that took possession of me as I was traversing the park," said the Princess Amelia, her own voice sounding tremulously, as if it were laden with ineffable feeling. "For I came forth to walk at an earlier hour than usual this morning," she continued, "and knowing that you would not think of coming to meet me until half-past twelve, I resolved to surprise you by this visit, which perhaps speaks more eloquently on behalf of my friendship than of my discretion," she observed, in a tone of embarrassment and with a blush again deepening the vermeil glow upon her damask cheeks.

"My angelic friend," exclaimed Sir Richard Stamford, now taking her hand of his own accord, "do not mar by any regret or compunction on your part the pleasure which this visit causes me to experience. Hitherto, amiable princess, you have performed toward me the part of the good Samaritan. You have poured the oil and wine of sympathy and consolation into the wounds of my spirit; you have rescued me from the doom of misanthropy and the fate of cynicism; and, guiding me gently out of the bleak and desolate wilderness of my own dark thoughts, you have tutored me to contemplate the roses of hope which yet bloom in this world even for one who has endured so much as I. Had it not been for you, excellent princess, I should have resigned myself to despair — or perhaps have flown to that more terrible alternative to which the desperate have recourse, but of which I now shudder even to think. Oh, how deep, then, is the debt of gratitude which I owe to you, generous-hearted lady; and how immensely have you augmented that obliga-

tion by the frank, ingenuous, and friendly manner in which you have now visited me. Henceforth this room will appear to me under another and far more cheerful aspect; and when seated alone herein, contemplating your image, I shall retain the delightful remembrance that you yourself have lightened the darkness of my abode."

"You are addressing me with an enthusiasm which carries an ineffable pleasure into my soul," said the Princess Amelia; "for I perceive that I have been the means of restoring you at least to some degree of happiness."

"Dear lady, when I am in your presence," returned the baronet, gazing with admiration upon her, "the past, frightful as it is, appears only as a dream, or as something which is so far off as scarcely to leave a black shade in the memory."

"And when I am not with you, the gloomy cloud comes back to sit upon your soul and brood the darkest thoughts?" said the princess, her voice assuming a tenderness which stole like Elysian music upon the senses of the baronet and carried a soft ecstasy of feeling in unto the very depths of his soul.

"Alas! when I am alone," he observed, after a pause of nearly a minute and now heaving a profound sigh, "I have only your image to solace me. But then I ponder upon every word that has fallen from your lips during the hours we have been together, and I repeat a thousand times to myself the solacing assurance which you always give me at parting, that we shall meet again on the morrow. And we do meet thus, day after day, and my existence appears to have undergone so complete a change and have entered upon a phase so thoroughly new that there are moments when I cease even to regret the prosperity of earlier years."

"And in order to keep you in this happy frame of mind," said the royal maiden, lowering her voice to a whisper that was only just audible, as she bent down her head to conceal her blushes, "and likewise to prevent the return of the gloomy mood, I should never leave you."

"Great Heaven! what words are these which you have uttered?" ejaculated the baronet, starting in mingled amazement and alarm at the sudden intuition which sprang up in his mind, or rather at the light which was thrown, all in a moment, upon the state of his own feelings.

" Wherefore this excitement? " asked the princess, gazing upon him anxiously.

" Because you have just made an observation, dear lady," responded the baronet, " which has opened my mental eyes to a truth unsuspected until now, and the sudden revelation of which to my senses produced mingled feelings of surprise and terror."

" And that truth — what is it? " demanded the Princess Amelia, trembling all over and still contemplating the baronet with those lovely azure eyes which appeared to swim in a delicious languor.

" I dare not answer your question," replied Sir Richard, now evincing much embarrassment and confusion.

" If there be secrets between us, Richard," murmured the royal maiden, " what becomes of the friendship which we have pledged each other? "

" Oh, what am I to say? What am I to do? " exclaimed the baronet, his whole frame quivering with emotions of an indescribable ecstasy as he pressed the hand of the princess in his own and gazed intently on her beauteous, blushing countenance; for this was the first time she had ever ventured to call him by his Christian name alone, and the circumstance amounted almost to an avowal on her part, or at least to an encouragement of such an avowal from his lips.

" What are you to say? " repeated the princess, who herself felt as if she were bathing in a fount of bliss and as if the gates of paradise were slowly unfolding to her contemplation all the joys within. " What are you to say, do you ask? " she murmured again. " Oh, answer me frankly and candidly, and tell me the nature of that truth which has so suddenly become apparent to your comprehension? "

" But I may offend you, dear princess; I may risk your friendship, — that friendship which I value more than life," exclaimed the baronet, bewildered how to act.

" No feeling which you are capable of harbouring can possibly offend me, Richard," said Amelia, her tone expressing the soft sensuousness which was diffused throughout her entire frame and was expressed in the deepening hue of the swimming eyes and the glowing tint which spread its carnation richness over her cheeks.

" Then you command me to speak candidly, dear princess? " said the baronet.

" No, I do not command," she responded, with an accent of gentle reproach. " I beseech, I implore."

" Then hear the truth, adorable Amelia," exclaimed Sir Richard Stamford, throwing himself again upon his knees at her feet; and gazing up into her blushing, burning face with looks full of ineffable devotion, he said, in a voice of fervent passion, " I love you, Amelia. My God! I love you with all the power of a grateful soul and an adoring heart."

" You love me, you love me? " murmured the princess, now enjoying the happiest moment of her life; and, casting her arms around the neck of the handsome man who knelt at her feet, she gave back with ardour the warm kisses which he imprinted upon her lips, her cheeks, and her brow.

" Love you! Yes, oh, yes! Such sympathy as I have received from you, sweet lady, could not fail to engender love," responded Sir Richard Stamford.

" Thank God! he loves me, he loves me! " still murmured the Princess Amelia, appearing to pour her whole soul, her life, her being, into the ecstasy produced by the avowal of affection which she had received from the lips of the baronet.

" And is it possible that you can love me in return? " he asked, rising slowly from his knees and resuming his place by her side, although without disengaging himself from the warm embrace in which she held him.

" It is possible, it is true, it is God's own truth that I love you, that I would lay down my life to serve you," exclaimed the royal maiden, with impassioned vehemence; and she continued to lavish her caresses with the fondest ardour upon the baronet.

" Your friendship, Amelia, was a boon which could not be too dearly prized," he said, returning the kisses which she thus bestowed upon him; " but your love, oh, that is a happiness so totally unexpected, so unlooked for."

" Ah! is it possible that you could have mistaken the feeling with which I regarded you, Richard? " inquired the princess, in a tone of tender reproach. " Did you not perceive that I loved you? "

" I dared not trust my thoughts upon the subject," replied the baronet. " But the nature of my own feelings was not understood by me until those words which you uttered just now struck, as it were, upon the concealed chord of tenderness and vibrated to my very heart's core. Thence the

inspiration was carried to the brain, and I perceived in a moment that I loved you."

"Oh, what happiness is it to love and be beloved!" murmured the princess, suffering her bonnet to fall off and reclining her head upon the baronet's shoulder. Then, closing her eyes for nearly a minute as if to shut out all external objects and thus render the revel of her own thoughts all the more luxuriously complete, she said, "And have I indeed taught your heart to love once more, Richard, and do you really comprehend the nature of your own sentiments? Because it would break my heart were you to tell me, to-morrow, or in a week, or in a month, or even in a year, that you were mistaken, that you were carried away by the enthusiasm of a moment — "

"Oh, do not mistrust the nature of that passion which I experience for you," interrupted the baronet, looking down into the depths of those beauteous azure eyes which the royal maiden now opened again, and which gave back a living flood of fondness in return for his own adoring gaze. "Do not suspect the truth nor doubt the sincerity of that sentiment which has become a worship, a faith, a creed, an enthusiastic devotion in my soul. Nor marvel, beauteous Amelia, that a being lately so lorn, desolate, and woebegone as I can have thus learned to love so soon and so tenderly again. For all that has happened is natural and easily to be explained; and I were indeed something less or something more than man had I not yielded to the Elysian influence wherewith I was surrounded. Not a month has elapsed since you found me the most miserable wretch upon the face of the earth. Every hope which could possibly bind me to existence was dead, crucified by the faithlessness of a woman and the treachery of friends. And thus had my bosom become the burial-place of life's brightest promises, the grave of every aspiration which this world's sun had gilded. My heart was a tomb wherein reposed the memories of blighted affections, ruined hopes, and false friendships; and at the entrance of that sepulchral heart had the demon of despair placed a stone to bar admission against all tender sympathies. But you came, Amelia; you rolled away that stone, and you sat in my heart as an angel, proclaiming the resurrection of hope."

"Oh, it is delightful to hear you thus account for that

love which fills your soul, and which I no longer mistrust nor doubt," cried the princess, flinging herself upon the baronet's breast and appearing to grow there. " And I thank God," she continued, in a tone of exalted fervour, " that I have been the instrument of thus reawakening you to a sense of earth's bliss and the world's enjoyment."

" This world has suddenly become a paradise to my view," responded Sir Richard Stamford. " And yet, even now in the midst of this felicity which is so transcendent as to appear a dream, even now, I say, does a sudden cause of alarm spring up — "

" Alarm! " echoed the princess, withdrawing herself partially from his embrace and surveying him with mingled apprehension and surprise.

" Oh, the alarm to which I allude springs from the love which I bear you," hastily exclaimed the baronet; " and it is indeed a natural consequence of that passion."

" I do not understand you yet, Richard," said the royal maiden. " In mercy, explain yourself, and keep me not in suspense."

" I mean, dearest Amelia," resumed the baronet, contemplating her with ineffable fondness, " that the love which I experience is not centred in a common object, but in a lady of the most exalted rank, a lady to whose hand I dare not aspire and with whom no clandestine marriage would be legal — "

" The love which I bear for you has no consideration of rites, ceremonies, or forms," interrupted the princess Amelia, with a decision which belonged to her character, but which the strength of her passion now mainly inspired. " It is a love," she continued, looking steadily upon his countenance, " which can recognize no human laws, no conventional statutes, a love acknowledging only the heart's tenderest and holiest ties, the soul's most sacred and solemn bonds. If this be the love that you can accept and that will make you happy, if this be the passion that you can reciprocate as tenderly and as devotedly — "

" Oh, can you doubt it, my best beloved, my charming Amelia? " exclaimed Sir Richard Stamford, catching her in his arms and straining her to his breast. " This is indeed a day of happiness for me. I awoke with a presentiment that many occurrences of a smiling character were to take place

ere night should come again. And I have not been disappointed. Behold those letters," he continued, pointing toward the papers lying upon the table. "They are from my solicitor at Aylesbury, and they arrived this morning. Their contents are far more cheering than even my most sanguine hopes could have led me to believe. All my property has been sold and realized. The Earl of Desborough has become the purchaser of the manor, at a large price, and not only has every creditor of the late bank been paid in full, but a handsome income remains for me. That balance-sheet, dearest Amelia, enables me to hold up my head again and look the world in the face."

"Oh, sincerely, most sincerely do I congratulate you, my beloved Richard," exclaimed the princess. "Heaven knows you have suffered enough, and it is time that the wheel of fortune should turn."

"It has turned, and a new phase is presented to my view," observed the baronet. "Oh, how can I be otherwise than thoroughly happy, at least as happy as a man may be who has endured so much as I? My character is fully cleared up, my liabilities are settled, the world once more calls me an honourable man, and then comes your love, my angel Amelia, to bless me with its heavenly influence. And that love, oh, I accept it as you have offered; I accept it as the pure incense of your affectionate heart, and I will remain worthy of it until death shall separate us."

"And on my side," said the princess, "I vow most solemnly, and I call Heaven to attest the oath, that I will remain single for your sake — "

"Oh, pledge not yourself thus rashly!" interrupted the baronet with vehemence.

"Nay, hinder me not," said the royal maiden, with a tone and manner of indomitable decision, while her beauteous countenance became lighted up by a kindred glow of enthusiasm. "Hinder me not, I say, nor fear that I shall ever repent of the words I am about to utter. But hear me patiently and attentively while I invoke Heaven to attest my vow that I will remain unmarried, Richard, for thy sake; that I will reject every negotiation which may be made by others for the disposal of my hand, and that I will live and die thy wife in the sight of Heaven, if not in the eyes of the world."

"The tongue of man has no language to express an adequate amount of gratitude for so much disinterested love," said Sir Richard Stamford, sinking upon one knee and pressing the fair hand of the princess between both his own. " Your vow is recorded, solemnly recorded, Amelia, and I do not ask you to withdraw it. Your love ls therefore pledged to me, and in return I pledge thee mine. Yes, dearest and most beauteous of women, accept the tenderest affection united with the most fervent gratitude of my heart; and believe that I will perish sooner than cause thee pain either by word or deed."

" And these vows which we have exchanged are irrevocable," said the Princess Amelia, in a solemn tone, as she forced her lover to rise from his kneeling posture. Then, throwing herself into his arms, she said, " Richard, I am thy wife, thy wife in the sight of Heaven, and thou art my husband."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE EXCITEMENT AND TERRORS OF GUILT

We must now return to Mrs. Brace, and take up the thread of her adventures which we were compelled to relinquish for a moment.

Although she continued to wear a smiling face in the presence of her young ladies, and although, when customers came, she assumed an exterior which was admirably calculated to produce the impression that no woman in the universe enjoyed a mental tranquillity more complete than her own, yet throughout the livelong day did she in reality endure the tortures of the damned.

Again must we observe that this poignancy of feeling arose not so much from remorse as from alarm, vexation, and despair at the perilous position in which she had placed herself. For every minute recurred the question, what was she to do with the body, and the oftener she put this interrogatory to herself, the more bewildered did she become.

Then, the necessity of maintaining a pleasant exterior was a task very far from being unaccompanied with difficulty; and she felt that it was hard indeed, nay, fraught with a mental agony the most acute, to wreathe her lips into smiles while a vulture was gnawing at her heart.

In the course of the forenoon, Harriet applied to her for the key of the bathchamber, that the housemaid might perform her usual duties there; and Mrs. Brace was compelled to invent some excuse the triviality of which made her blush up to the very hair of her head as she uttered it, and then the colour disappeared as rapidly with the mortal terror that struck to her heart. But Harriet noticed not that the apology was ridiculous or that there was anything peculiar in the manner of her mistress. It was conscience which thus

rendered the wretched woman a coward, and made her not only suspect her own actions, but likewise the construction which might be put upon them.

In the afternoon an ill-looking fellow called at the fashionable establishment in Pall Mall and insisted upon seeing Mrs. Brace alone. He would not state his business, nor yet send in his name; and when this doggedness of conduct on his part was communicated by a domestic to the milliner, she was struck by a mortal chill, as if death had suddenly seized upon her. For the first tremendous thought which the message excited in her mind was that her crime had been somehow or another suspected and that an officer of justice was coming to search the house. But at the next moment she discarded the idea as one which her terrors could alone have generated; and, regaining her presence of mind by an almost preterhuman effort, she commanded the domestic to admit the persevering visitor into her presence.

The moment the fellow was shown to the parlour, where she waited to receive him, she recognized a man whom she had seen in Grumley's company at Bow Street; and once more was she nearly annihilated by the tremendous terror which fell upon her like a dead weight. Sinking back into the chair whence she had risen, she demanded the man's business in a voice which despair alone endowed with any degree of firmness.

Her emotion was not likely to escape the keen glance of so watchful an individual as Mobbs, for he the visitor was; but as there happened to be wine-decanters upon the table, it instantaneously struck the officer that Mrs. Brace had been indulging somewhat too freely — in plain terms, that she was drunk. He accordingly said within himself, " Grumley was right; she is a wery fine woman, but it's a pity she drinks so precious hard."

Then, having hastily made this observation to himself, Mr. Mobbs proceeded to observe that he was a Bow Street officer, and that this was the reason he did not choose to send in his name or profession, as he thought that Mrs. Brace would prefer granting him a personal interview rather than exchange messages through the medium of the servant.

The extreme civility which Mobbs contrived to throw into his manner, and the language in which he embodied the above very natural explanation, not only reassured Mrs. Brace, but

likewise allowed her the leisure necessary to recover her self-possession; and, shocked at the idea that she had exhibited emotions which must be either incomprehensible to the man or upon which he must have put the strangest construction, she hastened to observe that she was suffering under a very severe indisposition, of which a bewildering headache constituted a part. She then once more demanded the business which had brought Mobbs thither; and the man proceeded to explain himself in the following manner:

"The fact is, ma'am, last night me and my master, Mr. Peter Grumley, the head officer of Bow Street, separated at your door, me going one way, and Mr. Grumley remaining behind to pay his respects to you. But he hasn't made his appearance this morning at the office or yet been heerd of at his lodgings; and therefore I thought as how you might have sent him off somewhere on partickler business."

"It is perfectly true that your comrade called upon me last night," said Mrs. Brace, who had now altogether recovered her presence of mind; "but he did not remain with me above ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, and then he took his departure."

"Well, this is wery strange," said Mobbs, evidently much perplexed. Then, after a few moments' deep thought, he observed, inquiringly, "P'raps it wouldn't be too bold, ma'am, if I was to ask whether you paid him any money?"

"Yes, five hundred guineas, according to agreement," was the prompt answer. "I know that I may trust you as confidently as if it were Mr. Grumley himself," she added, with a smile.

"To be sure you may, ma'am," observed Mobbs. Then, recurring to the topic which was uppermost in his mind, he said, in a musing tone, "I should scarcely think that Grumley has gone and got into dangerous company with all that swag about his person. He's rayther too knowing for that sort of thing; and as for his being attacked, robbed, and murdered in the open streets, that isn't likely."

"Depend upon it, your friend will make his appearance in the course of the day," said Mrs. Brace. "Perhaps he has taken a little drop too much in the company of some jovial revellers and is sleeping away his headache."

"No, ma'am, that isn't like Peter Grumley," said Mobbs, shaking his head ominously. "If he isn't murdered, then

he's bolted, that's all," ejaculated the man, a sudden idea striking him. " And now that I think well upon the subject, I dessay he has cut and run, not on'y through fear of the consekvences of letting that young gal escape last night, but also to cheat me out of my reglars in respect to the five hundred guineas which he received from you."

" I should not at all wonder if you have hit upon the real truth at last," observed Mrs. Brace, scarcely able to restrain her joy at the false scent upon which the official under-strapper had got. " Indeed, Mr. Grumley hinted to me last night that he was afraid it would prove the dearest five hundred guineas he ever fingered in all his life."

" Ah! if he said that, ma'am," exclaimed Mobbs, " there isn't no longer any doubt upon the subjeck. He's bolted, clear enough, and I'm left behind to bear the brunt."

" Well, as you were his associate in a matter which more or less interested myself," said Mrs. Brace, " I cannot suffer you to go altogether unrewarded; and I therefore beg your acceptance of these fifty guineas."

The eyes of Mobbs sparkled with delight as the milliner counted down the gold upon the table; and as he took up the shining pieces and weighed them in his rough, horny hand, he expressed his thanks over and over again.

" Of course," said Mrs. Brace, as he was about to quit the room, " my name will not be mentioned, under any circumstances, no matter what may transpire."

" Trust me for that, ma'am," rejoined Mobbs; and he then took his departure.

Mrs. Brace now breathed far more freely than she had done for many hours; and thus the visit of Mobbs, which had at first assumed so ominous an aspect and struck such terror into her soul, proved the source of an incalculable relief to her apprehensions. She saw that Grumley's disappearance would everywhere receive the natural interpretation of a flight to avoid the consequences of letting a prisoner escape; and this conviction inspired her with a sense of security which nerved her to look calmly and deliberately at the embarrassment wherein she was placed with regard to the dead body.

The deeper she pondered upon the matter, the more imperiously necessary did it seem to admit some one to her confidence; and she finally resolved, as the night approached,

to entrust the tremendous secret to Harriet, her faithful abigail. But she postponed the evil moment as long as possible; and it was not until the young ladies had retired to rest and the clock was striking eleven that the milliner, who was now seated alone in her parlour, could muster up courage sufficient to enter upon the appalling topic.

At length, feeling that an excitement was growing upon her which would speedily destroy all her resolution and throw her ideas into chaotic disorder, she rang the bell; and when Harriet made her appearance, she bade the young woman follow her up-stairs to her own chamber.

Upon gaining this room, the milliner placed the candle upon the toilet-table and locked the door. Then, suddenly fixing her eyes, which had in a moment become wild and haggard, upon the lady's-maid, she said, in a deep voice, " Harriet, I am about to reveal to you a terrible secret."

" Ah! madam, is it possible that you are on the point of giving birth to a child? " said the dependent, her knowledge of her mistress's frailty instantly exciting this idea in her mind.

" Would to God that it were no worse, Harriet! " returned Mrs. Brace, speaking in a hollow whisper. " But I implore you to steady your mind, in order to receive as calmly as possible a revelation that is only too well calculated to fill you with horror."

" Merciful Heaven! ma'am, what do you mean? " exclaimed Harriet, now catching the infection of the milliner's harrowed feelings.

" I mean," responded her mistress, in a still lower, deeper, and more hollow tone, while her looks expressed all the mingled anguish and terror that had become resuscitated in her soul, " I mean, Harriet, that there is a dead body in yon bathroom."

" Oh, horror! " ejaculated the young woman, with a stifling shriek, and, staggering backward, she threw her eyes in unspeakable terror toward the door of the adjacent chamber.

" Silence, and courage, I conjure you," said Mrs. Brace, clasping her hands in agonizing entreaty. " If you alarm the house you will ruin me; but if you will assist me, I will load you with favours and benefits."

" Speak, madam, what can I do? " demanded the lady's-

maid, struggling as well as she was able against the horrified feelings that had seized upon her.

"Listen to me for a few moments, my dear Harriet," said the milliner, speaking with all the rapidity of a hysterical excitement. "You remember that the Bow Street officer called last evening? Well, he became intoxicated, he pressed me with his licentious proposals. I was compelled to submit — my God! what could I do? I conducted him hither, and all in a moment he fell down dead at my feet, stricken by the lightning-stroke of apoplexy."

"Dead, at your feet!" echoed Harriet, shuddering convulsively and repeating the milliner's words with the mechanical impulse of dire horror.

"Yes, in an instant was I plunged into this cruel embarrassment," said Mrs. Brace; "and all last night I remained here, alone with the corpse. Now you are acquainted with this terrible secret, Harriet."

"Oh, I wish that I had never known it, ma'am," exclaimed the young woman, covering her face with her hands as if to shut out some hideous object from her view.

"Ah! now you drive me to despair, Harriet," moaned the wretched milliner. "My God! what is to be done?"

"I know not," responded the abigail, dropping her hands suddenly, but only to wring them frantically. "It already seems to me as if a murder had been committed and that I was an accessory."

"A murder!" repeated Mrs. Brace, in a hollow tone and with a convulsive start. Then, fixing her haggard eyes upon her dependent, she said, "You do not suppose, Harriet — you cannot think that I — I — caused the death of that man?"

"I am afraid to think, ma'am; I recoil from my own thoughts," returned Harriet, her tone and manner both acquiring firmness from actual despair. Then, as if suddenly conquering repugnances until this moment invincible, and summoning all her resolution to her aid, the young woman exclaimed, "But there is no time to lose, and we must meet this embarrassment face to face."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Harriet, dear Harriet, for this change in your conduct toward me," said the unhappy Mrs. Brace. "Tell me what we ought to do. I will place

myself entirely in your hands, and your reward shall exceed all your expectations."

"It is impossible that you and I can dispose of the body alone," resumed Harriet, her courage and presence of mind appearing to gain strength in proportion as the feelings of her mistress underwent a painful reaction. "We must make a confidant of one of the men-servants," she added, emphatically.

"Oh, Harriet!" murmured Mrs. Brace, shocked at the thought of falling so completely into the power of her domestics; but the next moment an idea struck her, and she exclaimed, "If I mistake not, there is a tolerable good understanding between you and Frederick?"

"We keep company together, ma'am," observed Harriet; for the individual to whom Mrs. Brace had alluded was one of the footmen belonging to that part of her establishment which looked upon St. James's Square.

"Listen, then, my dear girl," continued the milliner, who now rapidly recovered her own self-possession, inasmuch as she saw a means whereby the coöperation and silence of her lady's-maid and her footman could be alike secured. "About the person of the dead man there is no less than a sum of five hundred and fifty guineas, all of which he received from me."

For the reader will remember that in addition to the amount paid by the milliner for the services rendered by Grumley in the affair of Caroline Waters, fifty guineas had likewise been demanded by the constable as one of the conditions on which he liberated the Gallows' Widow from his custody.

"And that sum of which you speak, ma'am?" said Harriet, in a tone of inquiring eagerness, as her eyes sparkled with cupidity.

"Every farthing shall be yours as a wedding dowry," replied Mrs. Brace; "and I will give Frederick a hundred guineas into the bargain. Do you not think he will be happy to marry you upon these terms?"

"Leave it to me to manage," exclaimed the lady's-maid, her handsome countenance lighting up with exultation. "This very night shall the dead body be disposed of in such a way — But time wears on," she cried, hastily interrupting herself, and glancing with a certain degree of

reviving uneasiness at the bathroom door. "I will go at once and fetch Frederick to help us."

"But you will hurry back as soon as you can? You will not keep me waiting here — alone?" said the milliner, shuddering at the reminiscences which swept through her mind and which made her soul recoil in horror from the mere thought of the diabolical dream that had characterized the preceding night.

"In five minutes I will return with Frederick, ma'am," said the lady's-maid; and she hastened from the room.

But the instant Mrs. Brace thus found herself once more alone in the close vicinage of the corpse of her victim, a dreadful oppression came over her, the atmosphere of the chamber seemed hot, as if laden with the steam of human blood, a strange humming sound stole upon her ears, as if the low voices of invisible spectres were repeating the tale of midnight murder, and ghastly countenances suddenly appeared to be looking forth upon her from the obscurity which enveloped the extremities of the apartment and from every nook where the furniture threw a sombre shadow.

For upwards of a minute did she remain standing in the middle of the room, struggling against the awful feeling of uneasiness which was thus gaining upon her; but so intolerable did it become that she opened the door leading into the passage and listened in anxious expectation of hearing the returning footsteps of Harriet accompanied by her lover. But all was still, all was silent as the grave; and then Mrs. Brace feared that some one was standing behind her. Re-entering the room, she approached the cupboard and poured herself out a glass of brandy; but the creaking of the closet door on its hinges caused her to give so sudden a start that she spilt a portion of the liquor while conveying it to her lips. Nevertheless, she imbibed sufficient to animate her with that bastard courage which constitutes an armour wherewith to gird the guilty soul; and she repeated the dram in order to enhance that unnatural flow of spirits which was so suddenly excited within her. Yes, the burning alcohol had become her brazen corselet, her helm, and her shield, to defend her against the spectres of terror and the demons of remorse. The fiery spirit which she had so copiously poured down her throat became her armour of proof, and she staggered beneath the weight of her panoply.

Then, experiencing a sensation of stifling heat, the milliner proceeded to take off her gown and unlace her stays; and assuming a loose wrapper, she even smiled at herself complacently in the mirror as she negligently fastened the flowing garment around her luxuriant and voluptuous shape.

But this sentiment of self-complacency, which was only the feverish fume of the alcohol, speedily yielded to a feeling of anxiety, and she wondered what could possibly detain Harriet so long.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE DISPOSAL OF THE CORPSE

In the meantime Harriet had proceeded with light, quick, and noiseless step to the chamber of Frederick Dray, the junior of the two footmen in the employ of Mrs. Brace.

He was a young and handsome man, tall and well formed, possessing good hair, eyes, and teeth, and entertaining by no means a bad opinion of his own qualifications, both personal and intellectual. Selfish and profligate, extravagant and unprincipled, treacherous and hypocritical, Frederick Dray was in reality a most dangerous character, although the worst features of his disposition had as yet received no opportunity of manifesting themselves in the household of Mrs. Brace. Thus, although Harriet was upon the utmost terms of intimacy with this individual, she was far from suspecting how thoroughly heartless he was, and how capable of any turpitude in order to enhance his own interests or further his own views.

On the particular night in question, he had not long ascended to his own chamber when a slight tap at the door announced the presence of the lady's-maid, who has already been described in the early part of our narrative as a fine, handsome young woman, about twenty years of age.

Frederick, who had not begun to undress, was by no means astonished at this visit; and therefore the reader may rest assured that it was not the first time he had thus been favoured with the presence of Harriet in his bedroom at an hour when modesty would have blushed at the proceeding.

"Well, my dear girl," he said, in a tone half-kind and half-superciliously conceited, "you cannot do without me, eh?

Must come to your Frederick's arms? Couldn't live a week away from him? "

"You know that I love you, Fred," she observed, going up to him as he sat upon his bed, and throwing her arm around his neck.

"Well, I am not astonished that you should like me a little," he exclaimed; "for I am not the ugliest fellow in the world, nor yet the greatest fool. But what is the matter with you, Harriet?" he demanded, observing that there was something singular, or at all events, unusual, in the young woman's looks and manner.

"Frederick," she said, not exactly replying to his question, "you are aware that I shall not be able to conceal my position much longer. Will you not fulfil your promise — and — and marry me, without further delay?"

"It is all very easy, my girl, to talk of marriage," responded the conceited footman; "but where the devil is the money to come from? 'Tis true that I get good wages and pick up many perquisites and presents in this house; but I don't know how the deuce it is, the money does run away so fast — "

"Because you are so very, very extravagant, Fred," interrupted Harriet. "However, I do not mean to reproach you," she added, assuming her most coaxing and endearing manner; "for I am very fond of you, and I know that if you had the means, you would fulfil your promise and marry me."

"Well, I don't know but what I might," said the young man. "That is to say," he added, with a look of extreme animal grossness, "if I was sure that the child which you are soon to bring forth is really my own."

"I take God to witness my oath that it is," ejaculated Harriet, her countenance flushing with excitement.

"Come, you needn't put yourself into a rage, my dear," said her paramour, with the most haughty indifference; "for you are very well aware that I was not the first, nor the second — "

"But you know that I have remained faithful to you, Fred, from the moment that you began to pay your addresses to me," interrupted Harriet, the tears starting into her eyes; "and it is not generous to reproach me for the past, particularly as I never attempted to deceive you on

that score. I admitted that Lord Montgomery had seduced me, in the first instance, and that Lord Florimel had afterward been intimate with me; but none other save yourself — "

"Well, well, we won't quarrel about it, Harriet," exclaimed the footman. "Come, begin to undress — "

"Oh, but you have not yet answered my question," interrupted the young woman, impatiently. "I wish to know whether you would marry me, if we had enough money to set us up in housekeeping?"

"You really begin to make me suspect that you have either picked up a purse or found a treasure in some nook," said the man-servant; "or else one of your former lovers has promised to give you a dowry. Come, which is it?"

"And suppose it really was something of the sort?" exclaimed Harriet, with an arch smile which displayed her fine teeth and made her large blue eyes look roguish as well as naturally wanton.

"The truth is, my dear girl," responded the self-sufficient footman, caressing his whiskers, "and I may as well relieve you of all suspense at once, — I have vowed within myself that I will never bestow my hand upon any young woman who cannot show me a dowry of five hundred guineas. So now there can be no misunderstanding between us."

"Not at all," ejaculated the lady's-maid, overjoyed at the manner in which the conversation was now progressing. "To come to the point at once, then, I can put you in the way of obtaining five hundred and fifty guineas this very night, and if you keep your promise and marry me, Mrs. Brace will give you a hundred more."

"Mrs. Brace! What has she got to do with the matter?" demanded Frederick Dray, turning an incredulous look upon his handsome mistress.

"Oh, I will explain everything in a moment," she replied; "but give me the promise."

"Well, I swear to marry you upon those conditions," exclaimed the footman. "Indeed, I shall be most happy to do so, and sha'n't consider that I'm flinging myself away. But what is required of me in order to earn the five hundred and fifty guineas? — and what the devil has our mis'sus to do with the affair?"

"Listen, and don't start with astonishment, because you'll

frighten me; nor yet cry out, because you'll alarm the house. But the truth is," continued the abigail, her tone suddenly becoming serious and her manner solemn, " a man has died of apoplexy in Mrs. Brace's bedroom, and the corpse must be disposed of this very night."

" No! Is this possible, Harriet? " were the ejaculations which burst from the lips of the astounded Frederick Dray; but instantly perceiving how tremendous was the hold which the knowledge of such a secret gave him over Mrs. Brace, he hastened to observe, " My dear Harriet, I am ready to devote myself, body and soul, for our poor mis'sus — who promises five hundred and fifty guineas — "

" We must not waste time in chattering here, Fred," exclaimed the abigail. " Indeed, I have already been more than a quarter of an hour absent, and I promised to return in five minutes. So follow me in silence."

The footman started with alacrity to his feet; and Harriet led the way cautiously back to Mrs. Brace's bedchamber, into which she introduced her companion, closing the door with the utmost care.

The milliner, who had grown nervously impatient despite of the exhilarating influence of the brandy, was much pleased when she beheld the reappearance of her faithful abigail in company with the footman. Harriet, who knew her mistress well, immediately perceived that she had been seeking artificial courage in the bottle; but Frederick Dray was not a little astonished to observe that the milliner wore so cheerful a countenance under such horrifying and embarrassing circumstances.

However, there was little leisure for making observations with the eyes and none for expressing irrelevant ones with the lips; for Harriet hastened to inform her mistress that she had acquainted Frederick with what had happened, and that he was willing and ready to lend all the assistance in his power. Mrs. Brace thereupon opened the door of the bathroom, and, taking the light in her hand, entered that place where the corpse of Peter Grumley was lying.

A cold tremor passed over Harriet's frame, and she averted her eyes shudderingly as Frederick Dray calmly and deliberately proceeded to remove the cloth which the milliner had thrown over the face of the dead body.

" Why, it's the Bow Street officer, I declare! " exclaimed

the footman, after surveying the livid countenance of the murdered man; and he turned his eyes with an expression of mingled amazement and incredulity upon Mrs. Brace, his looks and manner both implying a suspicion that there was something more in this affair than had been communicated to him.

" Come, we have no time to lose," said Mrs. Brace, with a full recurrence of all that nervous trepidation which she had chased away by means of the brandy. " The money I have promised you is in the man's pockets; you can secure it at once," she hastened to observe, for she did not altogether like the looks which Frederick Dray had thrown upon her, and her guilty conscience naturally suggested the idea that he had penetrated the secret of the murder.

" Here is the money, safe enough," said he, after searching the dead man's pockets; and securing the bank-notes about his own person, he demanded of Mrs. Brace whether she had any settled plan respecting the disposal of the corpse.

" My idea was to bury it beneath the pavement in the back kitchen," responded the milliner.

" Capital! " ejaculated Dray. " It is the best course to adopt, and, singular enough, the dustman left his shovel by accident behind him a few days ago and has never called for it since. Come, lend me a hand with the body, and we will carry him down-stairs as gently as possible."

Thus speaking, the footman raised the corpse up to a sitting posture; and, stooping down behind it, he wound his arms about the burly form, while Harriet, who had by this time regained her presence of mind, lifted up the feet. Mrs. Brace threw the cloth once more over the head of her victim; and, carrying the light in her hand, she led the way from the bathroom.

Through her bedchamber was the corpse thus borne, and down the stairs was it conveyed as noiselessly as possible. Frederick Dray was a young man of extraordinary strength and muscular power; and he sustained nearly the entire weight of the heavy, inanimate mass of human clay, Harriet merely supporting the feet in the descent. Often did they pause to listen whether any one besides themselves was moving in the house; and sometimes, when the staircase creaked or Frederick unavoidably staggered against the balusters, a mortal terror struck to the hearts of the two

women lest the whole dwelling should be alarmed by the sounds. As for the footman himself, he took the entire proceeding with remarkable coolness and managed it in such a perfectly businesslike way that had he been a resurrection-man he could not have exhibited a more complete indifference at the handling of a dead body. But although this cold and imperturbable disposition was the very one to enlist in such a matter, it was likewise that which was most to be dreaded afterward; and this idea struck like a pang to the brain of Mrs. Brace as she led the way with the candle in her hand.

At length the bottom of the staircase was reached, and now the descent of the flight leading to the kitchen was begun. This was more difficult, because the steps were precipitate; but in a few minutes the task was accomplished, and the corpse was deposited upon the pavement of the back kitchen.

A bottle of wine was now procured from the cellar, and, invigorated by the generous juice of the grape, Frederick resumed his labours. By means of a poker which was worn away almost to a point, he succeeded in raising one of the flagstones wherewith the back kitchen was paved; and the shovel which the dustman had left behind now became serviceable in digging out the earth. The young man toiled arduously, the perspiration streamed off him, and Mrs. Brace and Harriet, who watched him with profound interest, were both astonished at the progress which he made. From time to time he paused to rest and refresh himself with a glass of wine; and then, as if inspired by renewed fervour, he returned to his task with the resolute determination of a man working for a wager.

And Frederick Dray's thoughts were all the while as active as his arms. He knew that it only required one good chance in the life of a man to enable him to make his fortune; and such an opportunity had presented itself to him this night. The milliner was rich, and she was now completely in his power; for he had indeed penetrated as profoundly into the truth of the matter as she had feared and suspected. But he toiled hard to clear away all traces of her crime, because it was by no means consistent with his own interests that it should be brought to light. On the contrary, it was a secret which he was most anxious to surround with as

many defences as possible, so that he alone should be enabled to hold it in terror over the head of the unhappy woman.

Such were his reflections as he plied the spade with all the vigour of his muscular arms; but the task was by no means an easy one. For the soil was very hard, he had not the requisite implements to break it up ere he shovelled it out, and it was, moreover, necessary to dig to a great depth in order that a sufficiency of earth might cover the corpse so as to prevent any disagreeable odour from exhaling hereafter.

Three hours therefore elapsed before the grave was hollowed to receive the murdered man, — three mortal hours, during which both Mrs. Brace and Harriet passed through all the torturing transitions of lively alarm, cold terror, profound apprehension, and awful suspense. Sometimes they fancied they heard noises in the house, — footsteps descending the stairs, persons breathing in the passage communicating with the front kitchen, or windows opening in the upper rooms; and then their hair almost stood on end and the perspiration burst forth in large and ice-cold drops upon their foreheads. At other moments they would goad themselves to desperation with the thought that Frederick could not possibly complete his task before morning; that even if he were able, the trace of the deed would not be altogether annihilated; that some clue must inevitably remain, and that detection was sure to follow. Then Mrs. Brace, on the one hand, fancied that she already found herself arraigned at the bar of justice as a murderess; while Harriet in imagination saw herself accused as an accessory after the fact. For although the abigail believed her mistress's representation that the constable had died of apoplexy, she nevertheless knew full well that were the corpse discovered in the grave which Frederick was digging to receive it, the dread cry of murder would be instantaneously raised.

Yes, three mortal hours thus passed, during which the murderess of mature age and the young woman in the bloom of youth were tortured with all the poignant imaginings of their fevered fancies. And they dared not express to each other how tensely their feelings were thus wrung, much less suffer Frederick Dray to observe how excruciating were their thoughts. For they were fearful of imparting their own terrors to him, thereby paralyzing the only arm which could

now work to save them; but the furtive glances which they stole at each other met at last and revealed to each how profoundly they were both suffering.

But at length the grave was dug, and the two women assisted Frederick to ascend from its depth. The corpse of the Bow Street officer was then rolled into the hole, and the young man addressed himself to the task of shovelling back the earth which he had thrown up in two great mounds, one on each side of the grave. Every now and then he leaped into the hollow to trample down the soil; and the nearer its surface grew toward the level of the pavement, the more easily did Mrs. Brace and Harriet appear to breathe.

The clock struck four as the footman trod down the last layer of earth; for the grave was now full, and still a large quantity of the soil remained heaped up by the side. But Frederick seemed fully prepared to encounter every embarrassment which presented itself, and such an one as this was naturally foreseen by him from the very first. Having procured a large sheet, he spread it out upon the floor, threw the superfluous soil upon it, gathered up the four corners, and thus converted it into a sort of sack, which he was enabled to carry upon his shoulders. He then passed cautiously out into the back yard, and emptied the contents of the sheet into the privy. This operation he had to perform three times before the whole of the superfluous soil was fully disposed of.

He was now well-nigh exhausted. The frequent applications he made to Mrs. Brace's excellent wine had hitherto sustained him throughout his arduous labours; but the effect of the artificial stimulant was beginning to produce a rapid reaction, and it was necessary to imbibe a considerable quantity ere he could muster energy sufficient to replace the huge stone over the mouth of the grave. This portion of the task was, however, accomplished at length; while Harriet compounded a mixture of white lead, sand, and earth, which she reduced by means of oil to the consistency of putty, and with which the flagstone was not only fixed in its setting, but the interstices were filled up.

The back-kitchen was now swept carefully with a carpet-broom; and Frederick walked several times over the stone, treading upon it in every point, to assure himself that it was firmly placed and did not tremble beneath the feet. The

result of this test was perfectly satisfactory; and thus had every trace of the crime disappeared.

The clock of St. James's church was striking five, as Mrs. Brace, Harriet, and Frederick Dray quitted the place where they had buried the corpse of the police-constable; and, retiring noiselessly to their respective chambers, they were all speedily plunged by sheer exhaustion into a profound slumber.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE TWO NOBLEMEN

A WEEK had elapsed since the occurrences just related, and it was about eleven in the forenoon that the handsome but effeminate young Lord Florimel was seated in the breakfast-parlour at his elegant mansion in Piccadilly.

He was dressed in the negligent attire of a *robe-de-chambre* and slippers; and he was perusing a tender note which he had just received from Pauline Clarendon, who was still staying at the Duchess of Devonshire's villa near Aylesbury. The communication spoke favourably in respect to poor Octavia, and contained the most fervent assurances of the fair writer's unchanging love for the young nobleman.

Florimel was already in the midst of his second perusal of this note, when the door was opened gently and a black page entered the room.

This sable menial was apparently between fourteen and fifteen years of age. Of low stature and slender shape, his form was nevertheless of a symmetry alike elegant and graceful; and his movements were as noiseless as if he were an aerial being. Though his skin was as black as an African's, yet in his features had he nothing characteristic of the negro race. On the contrary, his hair, which was curled in a myriad small ringlets over his shoulders, was of silken fineness, and his facial outline was delicate and pretty. His eyes were large and sparkled with intelligence, and his beautiful teeth gleamed like pearls between the lips which were rather full, but of a lively red. His hands were delicate and even girlish in their appearance, for the fingers were long and exquisitely tapered, and the fine, almond-shaped nails were of a pellucid roseate tint.

But although the fire of intellect sparkled in the eyes of

this boy, who appeared to belong to some East Indian race, yet were his manners so subdued that it was impossible to converse with him many minutes without receiving the impression that he was either of a sullen and morose disposition, or that he had some profound grief preying upon his mind. He spoke English perfectly; but his replies were always given in the fewest words, and in monosyllables if possible. He was, nevertheless, active and willing in the performance of his duties; and there was something almost amounting to the mysterious in the manner in which he glided in and out of the rooms with his tread so light and noiseless.

Such was the strange but interesting boy that now entered the breakfast-parlour where Lord Florimel was seated; but he did not open his lips until the young nobleman, hearing the door close very gently, raised his eyes and beheld the sable page.

"Well, Rao?" he said, inquiringly.

"Lord Montgomery, may it please your lordship," returned the boy, in a low and silvery voice, his form bending slightly, but with a graceful inclination at the same time.

"Show his lordship in, Rao," exclaimed Florimel. "You should not have made him wait in the hall."

"I am sorry, my lord," responded the boy, in the same low, quiet, and harmonious voice; "and I will not do it again."

"You are a good youth, Rao," said the young nobleman, in a kind tone.

The black page acknowledged this compliment with a more perceptible inclination of his slender form; and, gliding from the room, he almost immediately returned to usher in Earl Montgomery.

This nobleman, whose name has already been more than once mentioned in our narrative, was about thirty years of age. His countenance was a perfect specimen of manly beauty, the facial outline being of the pure Greek form, and the fire of the large dark eyes being only subdued by the long jetty lashes which shaded them. His brows were grandly arched, and his fine forehead seemed fitted to serve as the throne of the noblest thoughts; but there was a certain expression about the mouth which somewhat nullified the effect of the upper part of the countenance. Yet

that mouth was perfect as a feature, small, with lips neither too thin nor too full, and furnished with teeth white and pure as those of a charming woman. Nevertheless there was at times a certain curl, or rather, a mingled wreathing and compression of those lips, which gave a sinister look to the whole countenance, and thus marred the open, frank, and generous aspect of the noble forehead and the magnificent brows. It must, however, have been a tolerably acute observer to notice this effect; and thus to the world in general Lord Montgomery's countenance appeared to combine every essential to perfect manly beauty.

His hair was black, curling naturally, and shining with so rich a gloss of its own as to render needless the unguents of perfumers; and he possessed a superb pair of whiskers which were slightly tinged with a dark auburn at the roots, but speedily grew into a black as jetty and as bright as the hair. His stature was of the middling height, and his form combined graceful symmetry with muscular power. He dressed well, had a rich, melodious voice, sang an excellent song, was a famous horseman, had a taste for literature, and wrote beautiful poetry, danced gracefully, fenced admirably, was considered to be somewhat addicted to all kinds of fashionable dissipation, and was therefore a great favourite both with the male and female portions of the aristocratic world.

Such was Lord Montgomery, a British peer, with an estate tolerably well encumbered by mortgages, and whose signature was by no means unknown amongst the bill-discounters in the city; but he was wont to profess great confidence as to the lawsuit which was pending in Chancery with regard to the Bellenden estates, and in the result of which process he had no mean interest.

Rao, the black page, having duly ushered Lord Montgomery into the presence of his master, immediately retired, and the greetings which took place between the two noblemen indicated the very friendly terms whereon they stood with each other.

"We have been quite strangers lately, my dear Gabriel," said the earl, taking a seat; "and therefore I was resolved to call upon you thus early this morning, and have a friendly confabulation."

"No one could possibly be more welcome, Eugene,"

returned Florimel. "And how progresses the lawsuit?"

"Favourably enough, I think, and, indeed, I hope," observed Lord Montgomery. "Heaven knows it is pretty nearly time that it should be decided in one way or another, considering that it has now lasted no less than thirty years."

"But how, in the name of common sense, can it have been thus protracted?" demanded Lord Florimel.

"In the first place, my dear friend," responded Montgomery, "every one knows that it is much more easy to get into Chancery than to get out of it. A more infamous tribunal never disgraced civilization, the Inquisition perhaps being alone excepted. Well, then, the delays of that accursed court have been the prominent and inevitable enemies against which we have had to contend. In the second place, there has been an almost endless trouble in settling the precise manner in which the suits were to be carried on; because there were numerous old wills to consult, pedigrees to examine, marriage settlements to rake up, certificates of birth to find, and registers of burial to ferret out, before it could be established who ought to be the exact claimants."

"But I thought that the suits were renewed, after a temporary suspension, by your mother on behalf of yourself and your brother Raymond, when you were both boys?" said Lord Florimel, inquiringly.

"Your surmise is substantially correct, my dear friend," returned Lord Montgomery. "The process was originally commenced by my father, thirty years ago, which was just about the time of my birth. My brother Raymond was born eight years later."

"What! is he only twenty-two at this moment?" exclaimed Florimel. "I thought he was at least a couple of years older; but then my acquaintance with him is very slight."

"Well, as I was observing," continued Lord Montgomery, hastily resuming the thread of his narrative, and not pausing to notice Florimel's remarks, "the suit had lasted eight years when my brother Raymond was born; and almost at the same time my father died. Then it was discovered that by some traditionary privilege or peculiarity of entail, the claim to the Warwickshire estates had become vested in

Raymond; while my own claims, although the elder son, regarded only the priory with its annexed property. Scarcely did the lawyers ferret out those facts from the depths of mouldy documents and musty pedigrees, when it suddenly transpired that the Aylmer family had likewise some vague and indistinct claims upon a portion of the Warwickshire property; and thus the whole affair presented a curious but not the less bewildering imbroglio."

"And all this time the Marquis of Bellenden was in possession and enjoyment of the whole property, was he not?" inquired Florimel.

"Precisely so," answered Montgomery; "and as he was an amorous old fellow of sixty-two, my mother hit upon a method of settling the law disputes amicably and to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. She had an orphan niece dwelling with her, a beautiful girl named Laura; and she negotiated a marriage between this lovely creature and the sexagenarian Marquis of Bellenden. The alliance took place, and the documents were drawn up to the effect that, in default of male issue, all the disputed estates should become the property of our family at the death of the marquis, the Aylmers consenting to receive a sum of ready money as an inducement to waive all their claims. But, behold! the marquis died suddenly, before the deeds were signed, and confusion became worse confounded. The widowed marchioness, my beautiful cousin Laura, evinced so decided a spirit of her own that my mother could not bring her to any terms, nor induce her to listen to reason; and the lawsuits were accordingly renewed, as you just now expressed yourself, after the temporary suspension."

"And that renewal took place twenty years ago, did it not?" inquired Florimel.

"Yes, and consequently when I was ten years old and my brother Raymond two," said Earl Montgomery. "Our mother revived the process on our behalf; and its slow length has been dragged along until the present time, my cousin, the marchioness, fighting us step by step."

"Did the Aylmers renounce their claims upon that portion of the Warwickshire property to which they had considered themselves entitled?" asked Lord Florimel.

"The affairs of the Aylmer family soon afterward fell into such confusion," replied Eugene Montgomery, "and death

made such havoc amongst its members, that every claim seemed to be abandoned in that quarter; and the only representative of that family who was at last left was a female infant of whom the Earl of Desborough took charge. This child grew up — "

"Ah! your cousin, Fernanda Aylmer?" exclaimed Lord Florimel.

"Or rather Lady Holderness," said Montgomery. "Well, within the last few months she has asserted her right to the portion of the Warwickshire estates previously claimed by her family; and thus the Aylmers and Montgomeries are once more battling with the Bellendens. Do you now comprehend the position of this very intricate affair?"

"Perfectly, my dear friend," answered Lord Florimel. "You never explained it to me so lucidly and minutely before. But if you, your brother Raymond, and Lady Holderness all three succeed in these suits, the Marchioness of Bellenden will be completely stripped of all her possessions?"

"Except the income which she derives from a certain sum in the funds, and which produces her about two thousand a year," said Lord Montgomery.

"And do you really expect that you will all three succeed in the lawsuits?" asked Florimel.

"I confess that I am very sanguine," returned Lord Montgomery. "My brother Raymond's rights to the Warwickshire estates are all but proven; and Fernanda will not experience much difficulty in making good the validity of her claims. But my case, which refers, you must remember, to the priory property, is a little more complex. However, the Lord Chancellor must decide upon the matter soon; and I shall be truly glad when all suspense is over."

"I can well believe you, my dear Eugene," said Lord Florimel. "For my part, I would not have a lawsuit for the world."

"And yet there are scarcely any title-deeds which do not contain some flaw or leave some opening for quibble and dispute," observed Montgomery, "Indeed, some persons hold and enjoy large estates without possessing any title-deeds at all; for through the habit of entrusting such documents to one's solicitor, they are frequently lost or destroyed by accident."

" And sometimes intentionally, no doubt," added Florimel. " But I keep all my papers and parchments in a tin box under my bed — Ah! what do you want, Rao? " demanded the young nobleman, suddenly interrupting himself to address that question to his black page, who had glided with his usual noiseless step into the room, where he had, indeed, remained unperceived for upwards of a minute.

The sable youth made no verbal reply, but handed his master a letter upon a silver salver; he then bowed and withdrew as silently as he had entered.

" How long have you had that page, Gabriel? " inquired Lord Montgomery, as soon as the door closed behind the object of this query.

" Only a week," answered the young nobleman.

" I hope you had good references with him," said Montgomery.

" Why so? " demanded Florimel, surprised at the observation.

" Oh, I don't know; 'twas an idea which entered my head at the time," exclaimed Montgomery. " But the truth is, I do not like that noiseless way of gliding imperceptibly in and out of a room; and that boy made me almost shudder at the moment, as if it were a black snake creeping in with so much sinister mystery."

" Such a prejudice against poor Rao is ridiculous, Eugene," cried Florimel, in a tone of remonstrance; " and if we were not intimate friends, I should really feel indignant at the unjust suspicion which your words imply."

" Well, let us change the subject, my dear fellow," said Montgomery. " What have you got there? " he inquired, as Florimel opened the letter which had been brought in.

" A card for a masquerade at Covent Garden Theatre," replied the young nobleman. " Who on earth could have sent me this? " he exclaimed, turning the card over and over in his hands.

" Is there nothing written inside the envelope? " asked Lord Montgomery.

" Nothing," said Florimel. " And the address outside is evidently penned in a feigned hand," he added, scrutinizing the superscription with attention. " But I have not the least knowledge of this writing, not the remotest suspicion — "

" And yet the writer must be afraid of her penmanship being detected," remarked Lord Montgomery; " or else wherefore should she attempt to disguise it? "

" It is strange, very strange," said Florimel, in a musing tone and with his eyes still fixed upon the envelope. " The handwriting is evidently that of a lady, who has tortured its natural fluency into a stiff and awkward scrawl."

" An intrigue is at the bottom of this proceeding," observed Lord Montgomery, " and you must go to the masquerade. Doubtless you have captivated the heart of some lady who mingles discretion with her gallantry and conducts her amours with precaution; and she has therefore adopted these means of obtaining an interview with you. For my part — But, by Jove! here is the black page again."

And Montgomery actually shuddered as he beheld Rao gliding noiselessly into the apartment, like a black spirit.

The boy stopped suddenly short as that ejaculation struck upon his ear; and his black eyes, after darting a keen and penetrating look upon the nobleman who had uttered it, swept toward Lord Florimel, on whose countenance they remained fixed for a few moments. Then, as if satisfied by this scrutiny or relieved from some apprehension which had started up in his mind, the sable youth resumed his noiseless course, and, approaching his master, he placed a large parcel upon the table before him.

" Well, Rao, what is this? " demanded Florimel, perceiving that the youth had something to say, but did not choose to speak until questioned.

" It was delivered, my lord, at the same time with the letter," said the boy, in his subdued tone of musical cadence, " but the hall-porter forgot to give it to me."

" And who brought the letter and this parcel? " inquired Florimel.

" A ticket-porter, who immediately departed, my lord," was the boy's response.

Rao then retired, Earl Montgomery following him with his eyes until he disappeared by the door, which it seemed he had a knack of opening and shutting in a manner as noiseless as his own footsteps.

" What have you got now, Gabriel? " inquired the earl, turning toward his young friend, who was opening the large brown paper parcel which had just been brought in.

"A blue domino, by Heaven!" ejaculated Florimel, unfolding the ample garment, which was edged with a peculiar braiding and had a sort of star made of the same material upon the crown of the hood.

"The fair unknown whose heart you have captivated," said Montgomery, "is determined that the adventure shall be as completely romantic and as well defended by judicious precautions as possible. You are to wear this domino in order that she may recognize you at the masquerade for which she has sent you a card; and the costume is purposely signalized with braiding in such a manner that no mistake may arise, even should there be a dozen blue dominos in the room. You are a fortunate fellow, Gabriel," added Montgomery; "for all these precautions, and the evident anxiety which exists to shroud the adventure in as profound a secrecy as possible, naturally lead us to infer that the fair unknown is some lady of exalted rank and untarnished reputation. Altogether, the intrigue promises to be of a piquancy sufficient to move an anchorite."

"And yet I shall not keep the appointment nor accept the overtures thus mysteriously made," said Lord Florimel, whose manner had gradually fallen into a strange abstraction.

"Not keep the appointment! Not accept the overtures!" echoed Montgomery, with the most unfeigned astonishment. "Are you in earnest, Florimel, or have you so little faith in my friendship and discretion that you are afraid I shall betray you to the beautiful Miss Pauline Clarendon?"

"Those are not my reasons, Eugene," said the young nobleman, in a very serious tone; "but I will unhesitatingly admit, even at the risk of being well laughed at by you, that I am resolved, indeed, I have sworn, never to commit an act of perfidy toward Pauline. Therefore, my dear Eugene, I shall not take any further notice of the overtures whereby I have been honoured; and if you really value my friendship, you will not make the slightest attempt to dissuade me from my purpose. Poor Pauline! she loves me so devotedly, and she has latterly experienced so much affliction on account of her father's inauspicious marriage and other circumstances of a domestic nature, that I could not find it in my heart to plunge headlong into this intrigue, even though I were certain that it would never reach her ears."

"After all you have said, my dear Gabriel," cried Lord

Montgomery, "I cannot do otherwise than respect your decision. At the same time, I most sincerely wish that such an adventure would offer itself to me. By Jove! nothing could be more amusing, nothing more exciting. I suppose you would not like the idea of allowing me to assume the blue domino and take your place at the approaching masquerade?"

"My dear Eugene, such a proposal is unworthy of you," said Lord Florimel, in a tone of grave remonstrance. "Would it be honourable to the lady in question, whoever she may be —"

"I was only joking, Gabriel," interrupted the earl, who nevertheless bit his lip with vexation. "Of course this is a secret which you must keep religiously and as a man of honour. But wherefore are you thus serious, and why is your air so preoccupied? There is evidently something on your mind besides the present topic of conversation."

"To speak candidly," said Lord Florimel, after nearly a minute's profound silence and deep meditation, "the overtures conveyed by that masquerade-ticket and the blue domino have reminded me of an adventure which occurred fifteen months ago, before my brother's sudden death conferred upon me the family title and estates. The adventure to which I allude was of a most extraordinary character; and I could not help just now associating it somewhat with the present overtures, although there is not any substantial ground to warrant the supposition that the lady concerned in the former affair is the same who has sent me the masquerade-card and the blue costume."

"And that adventure of which you are speaking," said Lord Montgomery, whose curiosity was excited, "is it a secret, or may I, without indiscretion, beg you to relate it?"

"I do not think that there can be any breach of honour on my part in making you acquainted with the singular occurrence," returned Florimel; "especially as no pledge of secrecy was exacted from me at the time, and no particular lady's reputation can possibly suffer by the narrative."

"Pray proceed; I am all attention," said Lord Montgomery, drawing his chair closer to that of his young friend.

"You are aware, my dear Eugene," began Florimel, "that as my late brother was unmarried and was of an exceedingly nervous temperament, I dwelt with him in this

house after I left college; and although he exercised a species of parental espionage over me, as he was so much older than myself, yet I deemed it a duty to bestow as much of my time and attention upon him as possible. One day we received an invitation to a grand entertainment which was to take place at Devonshire House; and much as my brother disliked the bustle, brilliancy, and splendid confusion of such fêtes, he nevertheless felt himself bound to be present at this one, inasmuch as her Grace of Devonshire is related to our family. Thither we accordingly repaired on the appointed evening; and the magnificent saloons were already crowded with the élite of fashion when we were announced. In a short time the heat of the rooms became overpowering, despite the vases of refreshing perfume which stood in the corners of the apartments, and the greenhouse plants and flowers which were profusely arranged around the landing-places and in the brilliantly lighted passages, for it was in the middle of winter that this entertainment was given. Toward midnight, my brother suffered so much from the intensity of the heat that he was compelled to return home the instant the carriage, which had been ordered to attend early, was announced; but he would not permit me to accompany him. On the contrary, he bade me remain and enjoy myself until the end; and he observed that although he should send back the carriage to wait for me, I need not be in any hurry on that account. I thanked him for his kind consideration, assisted him into the carriage, and then returned to the ballrooms, where I entered fully into the spirit of the scene. It was about two o'clock in the morning that the company began to break up; and then commenced in the adjacent streets all that confusion, noise, bustle, and din which invariably attend upon the vast muster of carriages on such an occasion. The hall and the grand entrance of the ducal mansion were crowded with the guests waiting for the announcement of their respective equipages; the footmen were bawling out for the carriages which were in requisition, the link-boys repeated the cries, the coachmen responded from all directions, and these vociferations were mingled with the crashing sounds of wheels and the tramplings of horses' hoofs. At that moment there could not have been less than five or six hundred carriages in the vicinage of Devonshire House; and the arrangements to marshal and

muster them appeared to have been singularly neglected. I had undertaken to escort Lady Bonnycastle and her daughter; and, having after some difficulty succeeded in getting up their barouche to the gate, I had just handed them in and bowed the parting salutation, when, as their carriage was whirled away, another dashed up to the entrance. 'Who's next?' demanded the stentorian voice of the porter of Devonshire House. 'Lord Florimel's carriage,' replied a tall footman in dark livery, springing down from behind the vehicle which had just driven up and opening the door with alacrity. 'That is not my brother's carriage,' I exclaimed, the hasty glance which I threw at it convincing me there must be some mistake. 'All right, sir. This is for the Honourable Mr. Florimel,' said the tall footman in dark livery, touching his hat; and before I could utter another syllable or ask a word of explanation, I was lifted, as it were, by the fellow's vigorous arm up the steps into the vehicle, the door was banged, I became suddenly enveloped in total darkness, and the abrupt jerk with which the carriage whirled away threw me completely back upon the seat. At that moment my hand came in contact with the silken skirt of a female dress; and before even an ejaculation of astonishment could escape my lips, I was clasped in the arms of a lady whose warm cheek instantaneously came in contact with my own, whose bosom heaved against my chest, and whose voice, tremulous with mingled fervour and triumph, whispered in my ear, 'Fear nothing, Florimel, and pardon one who loves you.' Then, returning the ardour of the embrace in which I was so suddenly caught and so firmly locked, I gave back the impassioned kisses which were the next moment lavished upon me; and for many minutes not another word was spoken inside that vehicle."

"You gave back the kisses," said Lord Montgomery, laughing; "and it might have been some old woman who had adopted this stratagem to win you to her arms."

"Oh, believe me, my dear Eugene," exclaimed Florimel, "that although the darkness of the tomb prevailed within that carriage, for the wooden blinds were all drawn up, yet no sooner did I come in contact with that warm and glowing form, no sooner did I feel the firm, plump bosom heaving in its rich luxuriance against my breast, and no sooner did I taste, as it were, the luscious moisture of the lips and

drink in the fragrance of the balmy breath, oh, no sooner, I say, was I thus suddenly plunged into the sweets of paradise, than I became well aware that such raptures emanated only from the companionship of a most desirable woman. And abandoning myself to the thrilling and ecstatic feelings which were inspired alike by her impassioned ardour and by the charming novelty of this adventure, I became intoxicated, as it were, with the perfume of voluptuousness which stole upon my senses as a delicious dream sheds its influence upon the mind. Nothing could equal the intense fervour of those caresses which my companion lavished upon me in the midst of that pitchy darkness. Her kisses were long, burning, and devouring, as if she threw her whole soul into the profound sensuousness of her enjoyment. And when I gave back those caresses, she strained me to her bosom with all the indomitable fervour of her maddened desire, and with a violence which even hurt me, but which she had no power to control; while, beneath the influence of the kisses which I imprinted upon her lips, I felt her whole form twist, writhe, and undulate, as it were, in my arms like a silken cord that is shaken. For there was something even ferocious in the desires of that woman, something furious and raging in the headlong whirl of her passions."

"By Heaven! this is one of the most extraordinary adventures I ever heard," exclaimed Lord Montgomery; "and if I did not know you so intimately, Gabriel, I should conceive that you were endeavouring to amuse me with a romance."

"I am telling you the exact truth, on my most solemn and sacred word of honour," returned Lord Florimel.

"Such an asseveration is quite unnecessary, my dear friend," said Montgomery. "But pray proceed with your narrative. I am dying to learn the result."

"For some minutes," resumed the young nobleman, "I gave myself up entirely to the voluptuous enjoyment of that strange and mysterious adventure, as a man in a dream resolves to drink his fill of those Elysian sweets into the midst of which his fancy wafts him. The darkness which prevailed was that of hell; but the pleasure which I enjoyed was that of paradise. And all this time the carriage was whirling rapidly along, and I neither cared nor took the trouble to conjecture whither it could be bearing me, or

what was to be the issue of my adventure. The intoxicating cup of ineffable bliss was at my lips; and I abandoned myself to the delirious ecstasies of the draught, without pausing to reflect whether poison was mingled with its sweets. At length I said, in a low murmuring whisper, — for there was such a deep and absorbing mystery in this adventure that it almost appeared to me as if loud speaking would break the spell of pleasure and disenchant the glowing vision, 'Beautiful unknown,' I said, 'you have taught me the way to paradise; but the means you have adopted to entice me into this path of pleasure have been somewhat of the most extraordinary.' 'If then, dear Florimel,' she replied, 'you consider that you owe me any obligation for this adventure, the only recompense I demand is that you will seek no explanation from my lips, and that you will yield a ready assent to any little arrangement which I may deem necessary to ensure the continued envelopment of our amour in the deepest, darkest, most impenetrable mystery.' And then she strained me with renewed fervour to her bosom and lavished upon me the tenderest caresses; and, inebriated by the floods of delight that were thus poured in unto my soul, I vowed, in the most solemn manner, to obey my fair unknown in all things, so long as she suffered me to enjoy the pleasure of her society. Soon afterward the carriage stopped; and the nature of the precautions to which she had alluded now became apparent, for she tied a silk handkerchief over my eyes before even the domestic had time to open the door of the vehicle. We then alighted; and guided by her fair hand, from which my own received a reassuring pressure every moment, I was led hastily forward. A gate closed behind us; on we went, and it struck me that we were threading the gravel walk of a garden or similar enclosure. In a couple of minutes we paused; my companion let go my hand for a moment. I heard a key turn in a lock, a door opened, my hand was again taken in the warm grasp that gave me a reassuring pressure, we entered some building, and once more did the lady pause to shut and fasten the door behind us. She then conducted me up a staircase so thickly carpeted that even the clumsiest boots and the heaviest footsteps must have passed noiselessly over it; and finally I was escorted along a passage into a chamber the atmosphere of which was warm and perfumed."

"And the handkerchief was removed from your eyes, doubtless," exclaimed Lord Montgomery; "and you beheld the charming heroine of your romantic adventure?"

"Oh, how erroneous are all your surmises, my dear friend," cried Lord Florimel. "What, do you suppose that all the precautions which had hitherto been adopted to steep this amour in the profoundest mystery were suddenly to cease and even be counteracted by allowing my eyes to gaze upon that woman who had studied to draw so impenetrable a veil around her frailty and screen her sensual enjoyments from the possibility of detection? No, no; the adventure progressed not in the manner which you have conjectured. The atmosphere of that chamber was warm, but the heat came from an invisible source, for there was neither fire nor lamp to throw even the faintest glimmer upon the pitchy darkness which prevailed in that boudoir of love and mystery. The handkerchief was indeed removed from my eyes; but there was not so much as a streak of light to indicate the position of the windows. No, the shutters must have been well closed or the curtains made of the thickest material; and yet the heat of the room was not stifling nor the atmosphere stagnant. It was a wholesome air, though warm and perfumed; and it seemed to breathe a soft sensuousness which made me picture to myself all the luxury of a chamber devoted to the mysteries of love. But I was not allowed much leisure for reflection or needless conjecture; for my companion conducted me to a sofa, on which we reclined ourselves, and an adjacent table supplied wine, a goblet of which she conveyed to my lips with her own hand. Then she led me toward a couch, and in a few minutes we were locked in each other's arms."

"Do you suppose that it was her own house. or some place which she had hired for the occasion?" asked Lord Montgomery, whose curiosity was piqued in a most lively manner.

"It is impossible to say," returned Florimel, "I am narrating to you everything just as the adventure occurred to me; and you are positively as capable of making your conjectures as I am myself. At all events, I may observe that the lady was familiar enough with every nook, corner, and detail of the chamber to which she had thus conducted me; and if it were not her own, it is very certain that she must have often visited it before. It was large, and evi-

dently furnished in a luxurious manner. The table stood between the sofa and the bed; and near the head of the bed there was a large armchair, in which I remember depositing my clothes. But it is useless to enter into these details, inasmuch as the whole adventure defies conjecture, and its mystery will most probably be never unravelled. That some lady of rank experienced a caprice with regard to myself, and adopted those means of gratifying her transitory whim, is tolerably certain; but that I shall ever learn who she is or discover the house to which I was conducted on that memorable night, I do not imagine for a moment. Her precautions were certainly adopted with admirable effect; and so confident was she in their success, that she did not even seek to bind me by oaths or promises to secrecy in respect to the adventure itself. But the very nature of the precautions which she had taken fully proved how imperious was the necessity for adopting them; and therefore we may safely suppose that it was some lady of no ordinary standing in society, or whose reputation was incalculably dear."

"And yet others must have been in her secret," exclaimed Lord Montgomery; "for the coachman who drove her carriage and the footman in attendance upon it could not have done otherwise than obey special instructions; and, then, there was most likely a lady's-maid in her confidence also —"

"Those ideas have suggested themselves to me more than once," interrupted Lord Florimel; "and I confess that I have been lost in amazement and perplexity when I have reflected upon the astounding fact that the unknown lady must have risked exposure at the hands of her servants while adopting such immence precautions to screen her identity from her lover. She could not put confidence in me; but she placed herself at the mercy of her dependents."

"Strange inconsistency!" ejaculated Lord Montgomery. "But do you not remember the livery which her servants wore? Have you never since seen the same carriage? Could you obtain no information at Devonshire House whose equipage it was?"

"Your questions remind me, my dear Eugene," said Florimel, "that I have not yet made an end of my narrative. You will remember I informed you that it was about two

o'clock in the morning when I was precipitated, as it were, into the midst of that romantic adventure, as a man may be suddenly hurled from a rock to be received upon a bed of roses in the abyss beneath. Well, our ride to the unknown dwelling did not occupy more than twenty minutes, at the outside; and therefore by half-past two I was comfortably located in the voluptuous but dark boudoir. For about four hours did I there enjoy the companionship of the mysterious genius of the place. Oh, those four hours of intoxicating passion and Elysian ecstasy! Often and often have I since asked myself whether it was a delicious dream or a bewildering reality. And that it was the latter I am well assured: for who that had experienced the raptures which it was my blessed fortune to enjoy could possibly attribute them to a delusion? No, the thrilling ecstasy of those devouring kisses which were lavished upon me, the delicious contact of that full and voluptuous form which, naked and palpitating with the frenzied desires of a bacchanal, I clasped in my arms, the burning moments of pleasure which I tasted in the embrace of that woman who imparted all the electricity of her own maddening passions to the soul of her lover, oh, these were not the fantasies of a vision, but the never-to-be-forgotten experiences of such a night of love and mystery and voluptuousness as only occurs once in the lifetime of a man."

"I would give ten years of my own existence to have been the hero of this adventure," said Lord Montgomery, surveying his friend with the most unfeigned envy. "But let me hear the result, for I see that you have more yet to tell me."

"Indeed, the narrative is nearly brought to a close," returned Lord Florimel; "for at the expiration of the four hours, which glided away as if they were only as many minutes — "

"But how could you tell what time it was?" demanded Montgomery.

"Because a clock, apparently belonging to some adjacent church or chapel, chimed the half-hour," said Florimel, in explanation; "and then my fair companion murmured, in a plaintive voice, that it was half-past six and that we must separate. Literally tearing myself from her arms, I rose and put on my apparel in the dark, while she herself likewise resumed her clothing in a hurried manner. She then

blindfolded me once more, conducted me along the passage back to the staircase, which we descended, and thence led me forth into the enclosure, the gravel walk of which we threaded in a profound silence. But she held both my hands clasped in her own; and I guessed that her motive was to prevent me from raising the handkerchief surreptitiously from my eyes and thereby obtaining even that indistinct view of surrounding objects which may be sometimes procured between six and seven o'clock on a morning in the middle of winter. But I should not have attempted to penetrate her secret or solve the mystery of who she might be and where I was; no, I should not have moved the handkerchief a hair's breadth from my eyes, even if my hands had been free. For I experienced at the moment a boundless gratitude toward that lady who had chosen me as the object of her sensual fantasy and who had thereby led me to pass four hours and upwards in the paradise of her society. Therefore was it that when we passed out of the gate of the enclosure, and I knew by the sounds of horses champing their bits that a carriage was in attendance, therefore was it, I say, that I implored her in a deep and fervid whisper, to grant me an early repetition of the pleasure which I had enjoyed. 'Yes, dear Florimel,' she murmured, also in a voice tremulous with the reminiscences of recent delights, 'we will soon meet again. I shall not fail to adopt measures to bring you to my arms once more.' And then she pressed both my hands with ineffable tenderness; and in the next moment I was lifted, as it were, into the carriage, I have no doubt by the same vigorous arm which had performed a like feat at the gate of Devonshire House. The steps were raised rapidly, the door was closed with equal haste, and away, away was I whirled from the scene of that paradise of four hours' enjoyment."

"And then you tore off the bandage, you looked out of the carriage window — " exclaimed Montgomery, actually exciting himself by the strength of the interest wherewith he allowed his friend's narrative to carry him away.

"Indeed, I did no such thing," interrupted Florimel; "and even if I had so instantaneously torn off the handkerchief, the proceeding would have been useless, as you shall presently learn. But the truth is that the moment I was thrown, as it were, upon the soft cushions of the carriage

by that powerful arm which I had no doubt belonged to the tall lackey who had previously served me in the same manner, I fell into a deep but delicious reverie, in which I feasted my imagination with all the delights that I had just been enjoying in such blessed reality. At length I bethought myself that I was blindfolded; and starting from my profound meditations, I took off the handkerchief. The interior of the vehicle was of pitchy darkness, and I therefore knew that the wooden blinds must be drawn up. I endeavoured to open the one nearest to me, but it was fastened in its setting. I tried the one belonging to the other door, and my attempt was equally ineffectual. I felt in front of the carriage, but it was a barouche and had no windows there at all. Thus, my dear friend, do you perceive how completely baffled I should have been had I obeyed any sudden impulse of the kind which you imagined to have seized upon me the moment I entered the vehicle. You likewise see how complete, how effectual, and yet how simple were the precautions adopted by that lady to screen herself from the knowledge of the man whom her fantasy had made the partner of her bed for four short hours."

"The whole narrative is a perfect romance," exclaimed Montgomery, — "I mean, in the intensity of its interest."

"Yes, and that interest is the more absorbing," said Florimel, "because the romance itself is one of real life. But I was going to bring my tale to a conclusion, and this can now be done in a few words. For in about twenty minutes from the time that I reëntered the carriage in the manner I have described, it stopped, and the door was opened by a tall man. But he was dressed in plain clothes, and the broad brim of his hat completely shaded his countenance; so that, in fact, he was not recognizable in the dim twilight of the misty winter morning. A sudden impulse prompted me to retain possession of the handkerchief which had blindfolded my eyes and which might serve as a clue; but scarcely was the idea formed than it was discarded as mean, paltry, and contemptible to a degree. Moreover, I experienced an instinctive feeling that by leaving it behind me in the vehicle, it would be regarded with all the significancy of a guarantee to the lady that I did not seek any unfair means of penetrating into that secret around which she had thrown the defences of so many precautions. These

thoughts passed rapidly as lightning through my brain at the instant that the door was opened; and springing forth from the carriage, I instinctively gazed up at the house to see where it was that it had stopped. That rapid glance showed me that I had been put down at the door of my own home; but it was not so rapid as to be able to turn and take a deliberate survey of the carriage which had brought me thither. For, as I looked around, the barouche was already dashing away, and in another moment it was lost to my view in the obscurity which still prevailed."

"But you caught a glimpse of the colour of that carriage?" exclaimed Lord Montgomery, inquiringly; "and you noticed whether there were armorial bearings upon the panels?"

"So far from having made any such observations," responded Florimel, "I should not have known the vehicle again had I met it an hour afterward. Nor would you have manifested a greater keenness of perception, had you been in my place; for when I was first thrust into the carriage at the gate of Devonshire House, the proceeding was so rapid and my confusion was so great that I had scarcely an instant to notice anything; and again, when I alighted from the vehicle at the door of my own home, it glided away into the mist of the morning quick as the glance which I sent after it. But if I dared hazard an opinion upon the subject, and if the slightest reminiscence did really remain on the point, then I should say that, from the rapid and imperfect view which I had of the carriage when I was thrown, as it were, into it at the gate of Devonshire House, that it was a plain one and of a dark colour. But this may be all conjecture, and most likely is. I have now little more to say, and yet I will not omit a single detail, since you appear to be so interested in the narrative."

"I am indeed interested," exclaimed Lord Montgomery; "for it is altogether one of the most exciting, thrilling, and piquant adventures that I ever heard. But you had reached that point where you alighted from the carriage and it disappeared with such rapidity. What happened next?"

"Nothing very remarkable," returned Florimel, laughing. "I went up-stairs and sought my couch, where I slept soundly until the afternoon. I then rose, dressed myself, and descended to the breakfast-parlour, where I found my brother reading the newspaper. 'I hope you enjoyed your-

self, Gabriel?' he said, in a somewhat severe tone, as he eyed me suspiciously. 'Very much,' I answered, wondering what was uppermost in his mind. 'But why did you send word that the carriage was not to return and fetch you away?' he demanded, fixing his looks keenly upon me. I started in amazement, for I had sent no such message at all. But the truth flashed to my mind in an instant; and I comprehended that my fair unknown must have been the authoress of that message countermanding my brother's carriage in order that hers might take its place and perform its part, as indeed it had so effectually done. 'You have been in bad company, Gabriel,' continued my brother, observing the changing colour of my cheeks and the emotion of my manner, and utterly mistaking the cause. Nor did I choose to enlighten him upon the subject, but I allowed him to read me a long lecture on the impropriety of staying out until seven o'clock in the morning, and when he had concluded, I hastened off to call at Devonshire House. For I will candidly confess that an invincible feeling of curiosity had by this time sprung up within me, subduing the chivalrous resolves which I had previously made never to seek to penetrate the mystery of the night's adventure; and, under the plea of leaving my card at the ducal residence, I made certain inquiries of the gatekeeper and the hall-porter, who had superintended the marshalling of the carriages when the party broke up. Those inquiries I of course instituted in a very guarded manner; and I was even enabled, in consequence of my intimacy and relationship with the duchess, to question some of the footmen and pages belonging to the ducal establishment. No one, however, recollected the particular incident of a strange carriage taking me up; and, in fine, I could glean in that quarter nothing at all calculated to throw any light upon the subject. Fifteen months have elapsed since that period, and I am still as much in the dark as ever."

"Then your fair unknown never fulfilled her promise of contriving another interview?" exclaimed Lord Montgomery.

"Never," replied Florimel.

"Again do I pronounce the adventure to be one full of the most charming romance," said the earl, "and I am not surprised that it should have been so vividly recalled to

your memory by the unmistakable overtures conveyed to you this morning by means of the masquerade-ticket and the blue domino. Depend upon it, Florimel, your mysterious unknown has adopted this method to obtain another interview; and you cannot possibly forego the pleasure — "

"I have already besought you as a friend, Eugene," said the young nobleman, in a serious tone, "not to tempt me from that allegiance which I am so anxious to maintain toward my beloved Pauline."

"Then you are determined not to accept the invitation to that masquerade?" exclaimed Lord Montgomery. "In a word, you will not go?"

"No, ten thousand times, no," answered Florimel. "I have done so many foolish things in my life that I may as well endeavour for once to do a wise one; and I have broken so many solemn pledges that I am resolved to adhere faithfully to at least one promise at last. Do not, however, think that I cheerfully resign the chance of meeting my fair unknown again, if from her this card and this domino do really come. On the contrary, it will cost me a pang, but I shall feel more satisfied with myself afterward."

Thus speaking, Lord Florimel tore up the masquerade-ticket and tossed the pieces into the fire; and he then rang the bell.

Rao, the sable page, instantaneously glided into the room.

"Take this domino, my boy," said Florimel, "and burn it in the kitchen fire. I have particular reasons for wishing that this should be done immediately."

As Lord Florimel gave utterance to this singular command, Lord Montgomery started with evident uneasiness, and even stretched out his hand toward the domino as if in obedience to a sudden impulse prompting him to save it from the destruction to which it had just been doomed. At the same moment the black page laid his own hand on the garment; and Montgomery caught the rapid, piercing glance which Rao threw upon him.

"Let the boy take the domino, Eugene," said Florimel. "Do not attempt to change my purpose, I implore you. When the domino is once destroyed, it will be too late for me to alter my mind, even if the weakness of my nature should prevail."

"Be it so," exclaimed Lord Montgomery, scarcely able

to restrain his vexation; and once more he caught the eyes of Rao fixed upon him with a significancy which he could not, however, fathom.

But the next moment the boy glided away with the domino; and Montgomery rose to take his leave.

"By the bye, have you seen our buxom and agreeable friend, Mrs. Brace, lately?" inquired Lord Florimel.

"Not very long ago," answered Montgomery. "Indeed, to tell you the candid truth, I passed the night in her society."

"In her arms, you mean," said Florimel, laughing.

"I do not deny the soft imputation," rejoined Montgomery. "But I do not think that she will ever again be honoured with my company in the same manner."

"And why so?" demanded Florimel. "Have you grown weary of her *tête-à-tête* suppers and buxom charms?"

"Not exactly," responded Montgomery. "But a little incident happened on the last occasion, rather a disagreeable occurrence, indeed, in some respects — However, I must not reveal the secrets of a gallant woman," he exclaimed, hastily interrupting himself. "So farewell, my dear friend."

"Farewell," said the young nobleman.

Lord Montgomery took his departure; but as he was passing through the hall of Florimel's mansion, he observed the sable page Rao standing in a window recess, and evidently watching him with an interest more profound and definite than that of mere curiosity. But two or three liveried lackeys were lounging about in the place, and a footman was ceremoniously preceding Lord Montgomery toward the front door, which the hall-porter had already opened; and therefore the earl was more than half-inclined to disobey a sudden impulse which now prompted him to address the boy.

But still perceiving that Rao's eyes were following him with a strange significancy, he could no longer resist the secret and almost mysterious influence which urged him to address the lad. He accordingly stepped up to him, and said, in a laughing manner, "Well, Rao, have you burned the domino?"

The boy's large black eyes swept rapidly around the hall, for the evident purpose of ascertaining whether any of the domestics might be within ear-shot; and satisfied with the

result of that glance of lightning speed, he fixed his looks with a peculiar expression of deep meaning upon Earl Montgomery, saying, "Did your lordship really wish that I should destroy the blue domino?"

The nobleman started and blushed, for he felt that the boy had read the secret thoughts which animated him respecting the masquerade; but the next moment it struck him that Rao's words might only mean a piece of covert impudence, and nothing more.

"You were compelled to obey your master's orders, doubtless," the earl accordingly said, in a vague manner; "but it was a pity, all the same."

"Ah! your lordship thinks that it was a pity?" murmured Rao, darting upon him a look which seemed to penetrate into the profoundest recesses of his soul. Then, in a tone of unmistakable significancy, he added, "But suppose that I had disobeyed my master's commands, would your lordship think the worse of me for it?"

"There is some hidden meaning in your looks and words, boy," returned Lord Montgomery, "and we cannot converse any longer in this place. Call upon me in the evening in Grafton Street."

"Yes, at nine o'clock punctually," observed Rao; and he glided rapidly away from the window recess, scarcely appearing to touch the checkered marble pavement of the hall with his feet, so light was his tread and so glancingly went his steps.

The preceding dialogue occupied scarcely a minute, although we have taken several to narrate it; and not a syllable was overheard by the other domestics present. Nor were they surprised to behold Lord Montgomery stopping to address a few words to the black page, inasmuch as the boy had already attracted the notice and won the interest of every visitor to his master's mansion.

The earl quitted the house, and returned to his own abode in Grafton Street, where he resided with his mother, the dowager-countess.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE BEGGAR'S STAFF AGAIN

Return we once more to that sink of iniquity in Horsly-down, to which we have already familiarly introduced our readers, and which was known by the sign of the Beggar's Staff.

It was about seven o'clock in the evening; and the long, low, ill-lighted room was filled with company, — such company as was wont to frequent the place, and which consisted of bad characters of both sexes, all ages, and every variety of description.

The observer of human nature and the moralist would indeed have found food for earnest meditation in that apartment; for there might have been seen utter misery hardened into inveterate vice, ineffable suffering changed into complete demoralization, and all those phases of debauchery, profligacy, and loathsome wantonness which become apparent in the drunken orgies of society's outcasts. But had the tale of each and all of those ruffian-like men and those profligate women been ascertained with a perfect accuracy of detail, it would have assuredly transpired that not one single individual was naturally depraved from the cradle, but that all had become the miserable victims of tyrannical laws, the vitiated institutions of an artificial society, the ignorance of legislators, or the downright despotism of rich monopolists or titled plunderers.

For, oh, to talk of the freedom of Englishmen and the happiness enjoyed by " true Britons " is the most despicable farce and the most hideous mockery in the world. That freedom is a delusion, that happiness is a lie. The millions in this land are as utterly the minions of the aristocracy as Russion serfs are held at the mercy of their masters. The

white slavery of England is a truth more real, more terrible, and more tremendous than the black slavery of the Southern States of the American Union. Oh, better, better far to be a negro in a Virginian plantation than a " free-born " peasant on an estate in England; and more preferable is the condition of the purchased African at New Orleans than that of the mechanic of Manchester. For what is the spectacle which Great Britain, with its monarchical and aristocratic institutions, presents to the view? An absolute idolatry and the most servile worship paid to royalty and aristocracy on the one hand; while royalty and aristocracy, on the other, reward the sycophantic sentiment by testifying the most sovereign contempt for those who thus crouch at their feet. And to extend the picture, we have two millions of paupers and only one million of voters, more pawnbrokers than butchers, more gin-shops than bakers, and almost as many prisons and workhouses as churches. O blessed land of freedom, where such is the aspect presented to the eye. But this is not all; for in our agricultural districts we behold the peasant cheerless, sickly, half-starved, and feeble in the field, and our artisans pining and wasting with want in the factory. Our rural labourers dwell in the most wretched huts imaginable, while the industrious population of our cities and towns are crowded into hovels, and attics and cellars and cells with Pestilence for their companion.

No, Great Britain is not free; nor are her institutions good, nor her government just, nor her social system humane. The millions are in bondage, the institutions are worn out, the government is selfish and corrupt, and the social system is rotten to its very core. True, we have enormous wealth in the country; but those who produce it are starving! True, we have all the outward and visible signs of a consummate prosperity; but it is the luxuriousness which prevailed at Rome on the eve of her downfall, and amongst the Moors of Granada when the enemy was at their gates. The mocking edifice which fools and rogues call our Temple of Liberty is built upon the bosom of pauperism, and is surrounded by the gibbet, the chain, the hulk, the treadmill, and the spies of the law-officers of the Crown. Oh, what can we think of an institution which requires such sentinels and scarecrows to keep off those who will not content themselves with surveying it from the distance, but are venturesome

enough to approach its walls in order to ascertain by close inspection whether it be really as solid, as faultless, and as beautiful as the lying tongues of sycophants, place-men, sinecurists, and pensioners have proclaimed it to be.

One word more upon this subject. In this country we have illimitable luxury for a few and a misery as boundless for the many; we have the most gorgeous palaces overlooking the filthiest hovels, which the dwellers in those mansions would not have as sties for their pigs; we have the horses and dogs of the royal family better cared for, better lodged, and better fed than the human sons and daughters of toil; we have royal, aristocratic, and civic processions and festivals, where diamonds glitter like a galaxy of stars, while the countenances of the gazing multitudes are haggard with want, misery, and vice; we have families in whom vast estates are entailed, thus anticipating the property of the future, and others in whom appalling destitution is as certain a heritage, thus ensuring the sorrows of the future; in fine, we have a pampered aristocracy rolling in riches and revelling in luxury, and we have millions of honest, hard-working, meritorious people who are clothed in rags and can scarcely get a morsel of bread to eat.

Now, then, gentle reader, tell us, and tell us truly, is Great Britain free? Are Britons happy and prosperous?

And now to resume our tale.

We said that it was about seven o'clock in the evening; and the candles were lighted in the public-room at the Beggar's Staff. A blazing fire roared half-way up the wide-mouth chimney; and the heat therefrom was increased by the vapour which steamed from fifty pipes, and which impregnated the stifling atmosphere with the sickly odour of tobacco. Within the bar stood Carrotty Poll, serving the customers and rigidly enforcing the rhythmical injunction painted over the door leading into the parlour. Her appearance was more untidy and slattern-like than ever; her flaming red hair was in a disorder so complete that it resembled a bundle of tow, and was as deficient in arrangement as a new mop; and her gown was all open in front, displaying the scraggy neck and chest, the skin of which resembled dirty tallow.

In her avocations she was assisted by the slipshod waiter of whom mention has been before made in our narrative;

and whenever she had a moment's leisure, she passed into the little parlour, where she indulged in a whispered chat with some friend who was seated there, until the wants of the next customer called her forth again into the bar enclosure.

Matters were progressing in the usual way at the Beggar's Staff on the special evening in question; that is to say, there was no deficiency of obscene jesting, coarse conversation, smutty songs, and savage quarrelling; no deficiency either in coin to procure the alcoholic poison which makes depravity more depraved, vice more hardened, wantonness more brazen, and crime more desperate. In some cases the men were sitting with prosititutes upon their knees; in others, they were literally reclining in the arms of the loose women whose half-naked forms glowed ruddy in the lurid light of the fire; while a few young girls of tender age were sitting together in a group, each apparently straining every effort and racking her invention to the utmost to talk in a style more libidinous and filthy than the rest.

While the inmates of the public-room at the Beggar's Staff were thus diverting themselves after their own fashion, a man, muffled up in a drab greatcoat and wearing an ample woollen comforter around his neck, entered the pandemonium. His hat was slouched over his eyes, he carried a short but stout ash stick in his hand, and an ugly mongrel followed at his heels.

The moment this individual made his appearance, a sudden damp seemed to fall upon the company, for to the experienced eyes of the frequenters of the Beggar's Staff there was every indication of the Bow Street runner about that man. Nor was the conjecture erroneous; for, as he walked in a free and easy fashion up to the bar, he pushed his hat somewhat back from over his face, and the well-known features of Mr. Mobbs were immediately recognized not only by Carrotty Poll herself, but also by the greater portion of the company present.

"I don't come officially, my dear," he hastened to observe, in a loud tone, to the Big Beggarman's daughter; and the announcement instantaneously allayed the suddenly excited apprehensions of many whose consciences were not so clear but that they fancied it quite possible that they might be "wanted."

" Well, Mr. Mobbs, we're always glad to see you in a friendly way, you know," exclaimed Carrotty Poll, rendering her vixenish voice as soothing and her manner as cordial as she possibly could. " Perhaps you'll walk around," she added, after a few moments' pause, during which she knew that the person who was in the little parlour had retired into concealment.

" Thank'ee, Miss Price," said Mobbs, accepting the invitation. " I do want to have a word or two with you in private," he observed, as he walked leisurely behind the counter and entered the snuggery.

" Wait one minute, Mr. Mobbs," exclaimed the red-haired young woman, " and I will be with you. Let me see, what spirits do you like? Oh, rum — I remember — so it is," she added, taking down a bottle from the shelf; and then, arming herself likewise with a jug of hot water, a tumbler, and a sugar-basin, she followed the dreaded individual into the little parlour.

" Shut the door, miss, please," said Mobbs, as he snuffed the solitary tallow candle, which burned with a dim and sickly light even in that little place. " Have you heard from your father lately, miss? "

" Well, that's a pretty question coming from a Bow Street officer," exclaimed Carrotty Poll, affecting a jocose laugh, but in reality not much liking the query, inasmuch as she was instantly seized with the apprehension that her sire had been captured, and that Mobbs was come to break the tidings to her.

" 'Pon my soul, I only made the remark out of politeness," said Mobbs, in a reassuring tone. " Of course I know your guv'ner is out of the way, and though I had a hand in taking him, in the first instance, it was o'ny in the way of dooty and not through any disrespeck toward him. Quite t'other; for me and the Big Beggarman has had many a glass together — "

" Well, I'll tell you this much, Mr. Mobbs," interrupted Carrotty Poll, who was now satisfied that the man's visit to the Beggar's Staff did not regard her sire: " I know no more where my father is at this moment than you do, and I'm precious uneasy about him, into the bargain. But what's brought you over to the Staff this evening? " she inquired, as she placed before Mobbs the reeking glass

of rum punch which she had just mixed for his special behoof.

"I've already told you it isn't official, nor more it is," responded the man, taking off his hat and comforter, and unbottoning his drab coat; "but it's what may be called semiofficial," he added, with a chuckle, as if he had given utterance to a very witty thing.

"I don't understand you, Mr. Mobbs," observed Carrotty Poll, again experiencing an uneasy sensation on account of the ambiguity of the fellow's remark.

"Well, what I mean is soon explained, miss," rejoined Mobbs; "and the long and the short of the matter is that I'm no more a constable at this moment than you are, but that I've come here to see if I can obtain any clue to the unravelling of a partickler business, so that I may get restored to my situation."

"Then you're suspended, Mr. Mobbs?" said Poll, inquiringly.

"Just so," was the answer; "and consekvently my visit is only half-official, as the saying is."

"Well, but what is the business about?" demanded the red-haired young woman, somewhat snappishly, for her courage came back, and with it a portion of her natural ill-temper, when she learned that Mobbs was no longer dangerous nor terrible.

"The fact is," said the individual, "you've no doubt heard how a certain Caroline Walters gave me and Grumley the slip a week ago — "

"Yes, she jumped out of the window and drowned herself," interrupted Carrotty Poll. "At least, so we heard it reported in Horslydown."

"Well, the rumour was tolerably correct," continued Mobbs; "but ever since the very night of that occurrence Grumley has been missing, in a most unaccountable manner, and so the magistrates naturally suspect that he's bolted on account of that affair."

"P'raps they don't believe the story of the young woman's leap from the window in order to commit suicide?" observed Carrotty Poll.

"You've just hit it, miss," exclaimed Mobbs. "The disappearance of Grumley has thrown suspicion on the whole affair, and the authorities will have it that me and

him was bribed to let the prisoner, Caroline Walters, escape. So I am suspended until such time as the matter can be cleared up saytisfactorily."

"But how do you hope to gain any clue at the Staff to your friend Grumley's proceedings?" demanded Carrotty Poll, with an acerbity which she scarcely took the trouble to conceal. "Remember, Mr. Mobbs, that I for one have no reason to be grateful either to you or Mr. Grumley for nabbing my father —"

"Quite in the way of business, my dear," interrupted Mobbs; "and remember that although I am suspended now, I may soon be restored to my post, and I shall not fail to mark them as treats me with incivility while I'm under the cloud."

"I'm sure I wouldn't treat you with incivility for the world, Mr. Mobbs," exclaimed Carrotty Poll, understanding the significancy and feeling the force of the implied menace. "But pray do tell me what information you hoped to obtain at the Staff?" she inquired, with renewed mildness of tone and manner.

"Why, to speak plain, miss," said Mobbs, after a few moments' deep rumination, "I've been weighing in my mind this business of Grumley's sudden disappearance, and the longer I think of it, the more I'm convinced that he's made himself scarce for certain reasons."

"Ah! I begin to understand," exclaimed Carrotty Poll, whose shrewdness enabled her to detect the rancour which was lurking at the bottom of the man's mind in respect to his late superior in office. "Mr. Grumley hasn't behaved well toward you in respect to your share of the proceeds of some transaction — p'raps this very affair of Caroline Walters's suicide," she added, with a significant leer.

"Well, well," said Mobbs, laughing, "it's likely enough you ain't far wide of the mark, miss."

"And so Grumley has really cheated you out of your regulars?" observed Carrotty Poll, in a musing tone. "I shouldn't have thought him capable of it."

"Neither did I," rejoined Mobbs. "But there's no saying what may happen in this world, or what a man may do. Howsomever, it's of no use to waste walyable time in idle obserwations; and so I'll just tell you at once what I want with you and why I come to the Staff to-night. That Grum-

ley has made himself scarce, I'm pretty sure, and that he's got a large sum of money in his possession, there's no doubt. Now, such a man won't leave London; I know his habits too well for that. He'll keep quiet till the affair about Caroline Walters has blowed over; and then he'll either manage to make his peace with the authorities, or else set up in business as a thief-catcher on his own account. But he sha'n't bilk me in no such a fashion; and therefore I'm resolved to ferret him out. If so be, then, you'll help me, I'll make it well worth your while; for I'll give you fifty guineas for any such information as may enable me to unkennel the old fox, and, what's more, I'll take care that in future you shall always have a private hint conveyed to you when anything disagreeable turns up respecting the frequenters of the Staff. Now then, do you understand me, and can we strike a bargain?"

"I think we may," replied Carrotty Poll. "And if any one in London can obtain a trace of Grumley's retreat, that person is myself, for there isn't a soul frequenting the Staff that won't be upon the lookout when I give the word."

"That's exactly what I thought," said Mobbs; "and as Grumley is very naturally detested by all your folks, they'll be glad to do him an ill turn."

"No doubt," observed Carrotty Poll. "But suppose he should return to Bow Street and make his peace with the authorities, won't he remember me for any evil office that I may have done him?"

"How should he know anythink about it?" demanded Mobbs. "Come, Miss Price, there's no need of being timid in the matter, as I mean fair play on my part."

"But how am I to know, Mr. Mobbs," said Carrotty Poll, "that all this isn't some sly plant on your part, for some purpose or another?"

"Lord bless ye, my dear," exclaimed the ill-looking fellow, endeavouring to appear as amiable as possible, "what objeck can I have to serve in all this, except the one I've explained to you? But, to convince you that I'm in earnest, and indeed to place myself somewhat in your power, I'll tell you openly and candidly at once that the whole business about Caroline Walters's leap from the winder was a put-up affair on the part of Grumley and me; and a certain fashionable milliner at the West End, whose

name shall be nameless, was the person which instigated us to get the young gal off in some fashion or another. Well, we was to have five hundred guineas for the job; and as soon as it was done, — indeed, on the wery night that the leap from the winder took place, — Grumley called on the milliner aforesaid to receive the blunt. I went with him as far as the door of her house; and he said enough to let me know that he was rayther in love with her, for she's a wery handsome woman. Well, there we parted; and from that moment I've never clapped eyes on him again. Next morning I called on the lady, that is to say, the milliner, and she assured me he didn't remain with her above ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, at the outside. She likewise told me that she had paid him the five hundred guineas, and she gave me fifty for myself. I then took my departure; and now, Miss Price, you see how matters stand, and you will believe that I am in earnest in everythink I am saying or doing."

"Yes, I believe you now, Mr. Mobbs," answered Carrotty Poll; "but you will excuse me if I was rather suspicious at first?"

"Don't mention it, my dear," said Mobbs. "We have now come to an understanding together —"

At this moment the low door at the end of the little room was opened suddenly, and the Gallows' Widow made her appearance.

"I've overheard every syllable that has passed between you," she exclaimed; "and I think I can add some important information to what you already know concerning your friend Grumley," she added, fixing her eyes upon Mobbs.

"Indeed!" ejaculated Carrotty Poll. "Then you'll share the fifty guineas with me, Lizzy, if you earn them?"

"Yes, yes," said the Gallows' Widow; "I always act fair toward my pals."

"But what do you know about Grumley, Mrs. Marks?" inquired Mobbs, unable to restrain his impatience.

"I will tell you all in good time," returned the Gallows' Widow, now speaking without excitement and deliberately taking a chair at the table. "During the whole of your conversation, Mr. Mobbs, with Poll Price, I've been on the other side of that door; and therefore I have not lost a

word of it. The fashionable miliner to whom you alluded is Mrs. Brace of Pall Mall."

"Ah! you're indeed upon the scent, that's plain enough," cried Mobbs. "Go on."

"On the same night when Grumley called upon Mrs. Brace I paid her a visit also," proceeded the Gallows' Widow; "and I saw her and Grumley together."

"Is that possible, Lizzy?" exclaimed Carrotty Poll. "Why, you did not tell me anything about it."

"I have only seen you twice since then," said the Gallows' Widow; "last Wednesday and to-night, and on neither occasion had we much time to chatter upon indifferent things."

"But didn't Grumley arrest you?" demanded Mobbs.

"To be sure he did," answered Elizabeth Marks; "and Mrs. Brace made a compromise with him to get me off. In a word, Grumley imposed his own conditions, and she consented."

"What was the conditions?" inquired Mobbs.

"Fifty guineas in cash and a share of Mrs. Brace's bed for the night," was the startling response.

"By jingo!" ejaculated Mobbs, a sudden reminiscence striking him. "I now recollect that when I called upon the milliner she seemed very much excited and confused, and I fancied she had been drinking."

"But did you observe of what nature was the confusion she exhibited?" inquired the Gallows' Widow, her manner suddenly becoming profoundly mysterious. "Because there is an embarrassment arising from shame, and another from guilt. A man of your profession, Mr. Mobbs, ought to know the difference."

"Well, now, you've excited strange ideas in my head," observed Mobbs, in a reflective tone; "and I do remember that Mrs. Brace's manner was uncommonly suspicious. And the more I think of it, the more it reminds me of the way in which a woman looked and spoke when I went to take her up on suspicion of murdering her husband some years ago,"

"Ah! then Mrs. Brace looked and spoke like a murderess, did she?" said the Gallows' Widow, her usually tranquil voice now expressing a fiendish malignity.

"You know more than you choose to admit, Mrs. Marks,"

exclaimed Mobbs. "But, by jingo! if such a thing has really taken place — "

"What thing?" demanded the Gallows' Widow.

"Why, that Grumley has been murdered," replied Mobbs; "and now I have put into the shape of language the suspicion which you have excited in my mind."

"And you have fully caught the meaning which I intended to convey," said the Gallows' Widow. "For how stands the matter? The last trace which we at present possess of Peter Grumley leaves him at midnight in Mrs. Brace's house. He has never been seen or heard of afterward. It is quite clear that he did not intend to make himself scarce at that time; because if he had entertained such a notion he would not have arrested me. But that he had been making love to Mrs. Brace before I called was clear enough from what he said when he imposed upon her the conditions of that compromise in virtue of which I was suffered to depart scot free; and from all I observed, it was equally clear that she viewed with horror and loathing the prospect of submitting to the embraces of such a man. You must also reflect that she had that same night paid this very man five hundred and fifty guineas; and now what aspect does the whole affair assume?"

"Why, that the milliner had every inducement possible to make away with Grumley," answered Mobbs; "not only to get back her money, but likewise to rid herself of the necessity of admitting him to her bed."

"Such is my idea," exclaimed the Gallows' Widow, with the excitement of a malignant triumph. Then, between her teeth, she muttered, "Now, Mrs. Brace, I will be avenged upon you for the contempt and scorn with which you treated me the other night."

And in the little parlour behind the bar of the Beggar's Staff did Mobbs remain until a late hour in consultation with the Gallows' Widow and Carrotty Poll.

CHAPTER XXXVII

RAO AT EARL MONTGOMERY'S MANSION

It was nine o'clock in the evening as Rao, Lord Florimel's black page, rang the servant's bell of a handsome house in Grafton Street. A liveried lackey soon responded to the summons, and the sable youth was forthwith conducted into the presence of Lord Montgomery.

This nobleman was seated in a handsomely furnished parlour with a bay-window, and an open door afforded a view of a smaller room adjoining. Both apartments contained some very fine paintings set in magnificent frames. The subjects were chiefly landscapes; and amongst them there was one representing a charming piece of true English scenery, a picturesque village with its ivy-covered church tower.

Lord Montgomery was reading a book while he sipped his claret, when the black menial was shown into his presence. Laying aside the volume, and stretching out his legs before the fire with an air of indifference, his lordship said, "Well, my boy, you have something to tell me, have you not?"

"Oh, if the object of my presence here be so very trivial and unimportant," exclaimed Rao, in a tone expressive of a dignity cruelly mortified, "I may as well depart at once. Good evening, my lord," and the page glided toward the door.

"Stop, you wayward boy," cried Montgomery. "By Heaven! you are prompt to take offence."

"Yes, even as I am ready to render a service," rejoined the lad, with a marked significancy; and, turning around, he again approached the nobleman.

"Singular being!" ejaculated the latter; "are you more or less than you seem? Surely you were not bred and born

to be the lackey of an Englishman? There is a grace in your movements, an elegance in your attitudes, a perfect accuracy in your speech, a gentility in your manners — "

"Enough of flattery, my lord," exclaimed Rao, sharply. "Who and what I am matters not to you; and if you suspect that I am not what I appear, you will keep your own counsel in that respect, because I am prepared to render you a service of a nature which will lay you under no small obligation toward me."

"Sit down, Rao, sit down," said Lord Montgomery, well convinced that the boy was indeed something more than he appeared and that the lackey's livery suited not well his real condition, however elegantly it might become his slight and graceful figure. "Now will you take a glass of wine?"

"I thank your lordship," responded the page, "but my favourite beverage is water. And now you will permit me at once to open the discourse upon the topic which it is destined to take, inasmuch as I dare not remain too long absent from Piccadilly."

"Proceed," said Lord Montgomery, the first feeling of prejudice and dislike which he had entertained toward the page having already changed into one of sympathy and interest.

"Your lordship intends to be present at the masquerade which is to take place at Covent Garden to-morrow night?" said Rao, fixing his dark eyes with a peculiar keenness upon the nobleman's countenance.

"Yes, such is my intention," was the reply.

"And your lordship would fain personate my master, Lord Florimel?" continued Rao, in the same precise tone and positive manner which seemed to show that he was describing those thoughts which he had fathomed, and was not hazarding interrogative conjectures.

"Well, I am not audacious enough to deny the truth of your surmise," said Lord Montgomery.

"Surmise!" echoed the boy, in a contemptuous tone. "Think you, my lord, that I cannot read your hidden soul as plainly as the printed page of a book? Yes, I have penetrated all your thoughts and wishes in respect to that masquerade; ay, and I have read all the hopes which the nar-

rative of Lord Florimel's romantic adventure has excited within you."

"Then you played the eavesdropper, Rao, when your master was telling me that strange story?" exclaimed Earl Montgomery.

"Yes, I have read all your secret wishes and all your fervent hopes, my lord," resumed the boy, without heeding the remark which the nobleman had just made, and which proclaimed an accusation that he would doubtless have denied if he could.

At this instant the door was opened, and a servant entered the room. Rao started to his feet, evidently to save Lord Montgomery from any suspicion or misconstruction that might arise from the fact of his being found familiarly seated with a liveried page; and the nobleman threw at the boy a rapid glance expressive of his thanks for this proof of good taste on his part.

"Please your lordship," said the domestic who had just entered the room, "Mr. Rigden requests an immediate interview. He has only one word to say, and will not detain your lordship a minute."

"Show him in," returned Montgomery. Then, observing the page, whose presence he had at the instant forgotten, he said, "Step into the adjacent room, my boy, while I say a few words to my solicitor. It is not worth the trouble to make you step out into the hall for the short period that we shall be engaged together."

This proceeding on the earl's part was another phase of that tacit respect with which he was inspired toward Rao by the belief that he was something more than he seemed, — an idea that forbade the nobleman from treating the boy as a mere lackey. And Rao understood the considerate feeling which was thus manifested toward him: for even as he glided into the adjoining room, he looked back to express his grateful appreciation thereof with a rapid, fervent glance.

The sable page closed the door behind him; and at the same moment Mr. Rigden was ushered into the presence of Lord Montgomery.

The attorney was a middle-aged man, with a pale face and keen gray eyes. He was dressed in black, wore a white cravat and ample shirt-frill, and was altogether very precise in his personal appearance. He took snuff, but he managed

the habit in so cleanly a manner that his linen never betrayed it even by a single grain of the pulverized weed. His bearing was naturally cold, reserved, and distant; he never spoke hastily, and scarcely ever betrayed an emotion, much less a feeling of excitement. In fine, he was one of those shrewd, cautious, and even mistrustful men who never take a step without looking well where they are about to tread and never give utterance to a word without having deliberately weighed it in all its probable or possible bearings.

" Well, Rigden," said Lord Montgomery, rising to proffer his hand to the lawyer, while the domestic who had introduced him retired immediately from the apartment, " what news? Has anything unpleasant happened? "

" Nothing unpleasant," answered the attorney, abandoning the tips of two fingers to the nobleman's grasp, for he himself hated shaking hands and all similar proofs of friendship or social amenity. " Just as I was leaving my office this evening I received a certain notice from the court; and I thought that as I was compelled to visit your neighbourhood at about nine, I would call and communicate the circumstances to your lordship."

" And what is the notice about? " demanded Montgomery, literally trembling with feverish impatience.

" The notice, my lord," said Mr. Rigden, taking out his gold snuff-box and deliberately indulging in a pinch of its contents, " is from the Court of Chancery, and is to the effect that the Master's final report will be delivered in on Saturday next in the several matters of ' Montgomery *versus* Bellenden,' ' Raymond Montgomery *versus* Bellenden,' and ' Aylmer *versus* Bellenden.' "

" On Saturday next? " repeated the nobleman, with the air of one who trembled at the close proximity of an event to which he had nevertheless been looking forward with so much anxiety.

" Yes, on Saturday next," said Mr. Rigden.

" Then all the fresh evidence has been put in? " continued Montgomery, in a tone of anxious inquiry; " all the important and very remarkable testimony which I have procured from the country within the last few weeks? "

" It is all before the Master, my lord," replied Mr. Rigden.

" Come now, do throw off this hyperborean chill, this more

than professional reserve," exclaimed Lord Montgomery, "and tell me candidly and as a friend whether you feel convinced that the decrees will be in our favour."

"Nothing, my lord, is certain in this world," responded the attorney, taking another pinch of snuff, and leaning forward in such a manner that not a grain should alight upon his snowy shirt-frill; "and of all uncertain things the results of Chancery suits are the most incalculable," he added.

"But the evidence I procured the other day," insisted Lord Montgomery, "must prove overwhelming."

"It will have its weight, my lord," said the attorney. "By the bye, your brother, Lord Raymond Montgomery, should be in London in the course of the week, as his presence is indispensable. You remember how singular is that clause of your ancestor's will under which he claims the Warwickshire estates."

"Indeed, I can scarcely have forgotten a single syllable of a testamentary provision so vitally important to our family interests," observed Lord Montgomery. "But I will write to my brother to-morrow," he added, hastily, "and I will urge him to come up to town without delay. I have not heard from him, nor indeed of him, for some weeks past."

"His melancholy disposition leads him to seek the retirement of a rural existence," observed the attorney. "But does his lordship still feel as much as ever that disappointment which his heart's affections experienced? And, by the bye, when I think of it, the marriage of Miss Aylmer to Mr. Clarendon, now Lord Holderness, must have been a sad blow to your unhappy brother, inasmuch as it destroyed the last hope which he could possibly have cherished — "

"Yes, he no doubt loved Fernanda very dearly," observed Lord Montgomery, with a certain hastiness, amounting almost to a pettishness of manner, as if he either disliked the subject, or thought it irrelevant at that moment. "I suppose that now the Master's report is ready, judgment will be delivered very shortly? "

"We have every reason to hope so, my lord," returned Mr. Rigden. "But in case your lordship should forget to write to Lord Raymond to-morrow, I will myself communi-

cate with him. I presume a letter will reach him at Malden Farm?"

"He was there when I heard of him last," responded Earl Montgomery. "You had better write to him yourself; it will be more regular."

"I shall assuredly do so," said the attorney, taking another pinch of snuff. "And now, before I leave your lordship," he continued, a thought striking him, "I should wish to ask a certain question respecting a noble acquaintance of yours — and yet I scarcely know how to take such a liberty — "

"Do not hesitate, Mr. Rigden," exclaimed Lord Montgomery. "If I can serve you in any manner, I shall be delighted. To whom of my noble acquaintances do you allude?"

"To Lord Florimel," answered the attorney. "But lest the question which I am desirous to ask your lordship should appear impertinent, I will explain in a few words my motives in putting it. The fact is, that this very morning a noble client of mine introduced to me a young man who has suddenly and strangely discovered certain grounds and reasons for supposing that he has claims of an extraordinary nature which would materially affect the fortune and the social position of Lord Florimel; and I must frankly confess that as far as I was enabled to look into the matter at the moment it was presented to me, the young man's claims appear to be well worth a lawsuit. At the same time, I have no doubt that he would listen to any reasonable terms for an amicable settlement without the intervention of the tribunals; and to this course I should recommend him to accede. The question, therefore, that I was desirous to ask your lordship, is whether Lord Florimel is a man likely to treat the affair in a friendly way if it be submitted to him in the same spirit, or whether he is one of those obstinate individuals, who, believing that possession is worth nine points of the law, will plunge headlong into Chancery with a neck or nothing determination."

"I should say that Lord Florimel will listen to reason," answered Montgomery. "But I am sorry to hear that he is menaced in so serious a manner, and I am pretty sure that he suspects nothing of the kind; for I was with him this morning for a couple of hours, and we were conversing

in a most familiar strain upon many topics of a private nature."

"No, he at present entertains not the slightest idea of the storm which is brewing," observed Rigden; "and I must beg your lordship, as a particular favour, not to mention a word upon the subject until he shall first broach it to you. For it was in a pure friendly spirit that I put such a question to you just now; and I repeat, that my advice will be to the effect of a private compromise instead of an appeal to the law courts."

"Would it be indiscreet to ask who is the claimant and what is the nature of his claims against Lord Florimel?" said Montgomery. "I pledge you my honour that not a syllable of anything you may communicate shall pass my lips."

"My lord, I cannot mention the name of the claimant," said the lawyer, "because the matter is as yet entirely in its infancy. But this much I have no objection to state, that the claims advanced are of the most sweeping and extensive nature, not only striking at the possessions of Lord Florimel, but even at his very right to the peerage itself."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Montgomery, "you astonish me. And yet it was but this very morning that Lord Florimel happened to mention to me, in the course of conversation, that he was in possession of all the deeds and documents regarding his estates."

"Ah! he told your lordship that, did he?" said Mr. Rigden, taking a pinch of snuff. "Then all I can now add is that the piece of information you have just given me has quite set at rest one portion of the matter of which I have been speaking; for the claims of the young man to the Florimel estates are founded upon a belief that no regular deeds conferring a title upon the present holder are in existence."

"Then I am glad you have mentioned the affair to me, my dear Rigden," exclaimed Montgomery; "for I can assure you that Florimel not only possesses his deeds and parchments, but has even told me where he keeps them."

"In that case, as I said before, one part of the business is set at rest," observed the lawyer. "The only claim now remaining regards the peerage, and that point cannot be

worth disputing, inasmuch as a mere empty title would be a burden instead of an honour to a penniless man. So, after all, I think that Lord Florimel is quite safe, and I return your lordship many thanks for the information you have given me. Good evening, my lord."

"Will you not step up-stairs to the drawing-room and inform my mother of the notice you have received from the Chancery Court?" inquired Montgomery. "The countess is all alone this evening."

"I will do myself the honour of waiting upon her," said Rigden; and, with a ceremonious bow, he quitted the apartment.

At the same moment that the door closed behind him, the remembrance that the black page was in the adjoining room flashed to the brain of Lord Montgomery, who had altogether forgotten the circumstance during the interview with the lawyer.

"Perdition!" muttered the nobleman to himself, as he recollected the eavesdropping propensities of the sable page; but he was almost instantaneously reassured by the thought that nothing had passed with the lawyer touching his own family affairs that he could care about the boy overhearing, while all that had been said respecting Lord Florimel was of very inferior importance.

Throwing open the door of communication between the two apartments, the nobleman was about to call Rao by name, when he caught sight of the boy reclining in a large armchair and apparently wrapped in the profoundest repose. Montgomery advanced into the inner room, where a light was also burning as well as in the other, and the door, escaping from his hand, closed with some degree of violence. Rao started up, rubbed his eyes, and in a few moments seemed to recollect where he was.

"I humbly beg your lordship's pardon," he said, "for having so far forgotten myself as to fall asleep. But is it late?" he demanded, with a sudden anxiety.

"A quarter to ten," answered Montgomery, referring to his watch. "That cursed lawyer came for a minute and stayed half an hour."

"And I will not detain your lordship one-tenth of that time," said Rao. "To sum up, therefore, all I have said or was about to say, I will at once observe that as your lord-

ship intends to go to the masquerade to-morrow night, you will do well to accept the loan of a domino which I will leave with your lordship's valet in the course of the day."

"Ah! I understand you full well, Rao," exclaimed the earl. "Your master's commands have been disobeyed, and you have not destroyed the blue domino."

The black page smiled with an arch significancy, but made no reply.

"And yet," observed Montgomery, "I cannot conceive wherefore you should have shown so much anxiety not only to fathom my desires, but also to gratify them."

"Simply because I am fond of amusing myself in a particular manner," said Rao; "and the sort of amusement which I like is what you English people call mischief."

"Yes, I have heard that East Indians are apt to be as mischievous as monkeys," observed the nobleman, laughing, "and now I have received a proof of it. Well, my good boy, I accept your offer, and I will wear the domino. But of course this is a secret between you and me."

"I am not likely to reveal it," said Rao, laconically.

"And I pledge you my word that I will not," returned the nobleman. Then, after a few moments' hesitation, he said, "But tell me how I can reward you for this service which you are rendering me, for I scarcely know by what means to testify my sense of your kindness."

"I require nothing at present, my lord," answered Rao. "Should I ever need a boon at your hands, I shall come and ask it."

"And most cheerfully shall I grant your request, if it be in my power to do so," said the earl.

The black page bowed a slight but graceful acknowledgment of the pledge thus given, and then took his departure, gliding away from the nobleman's presence like a shadow.

"There is something incomprehensibly mysterious about that boy," said Lord Montgomery to himself, as he returned to his seat in the front room.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE MASQUERADE — SCENE THE FIRST

Faithful to his promise, the black page delivered the braided domino at Lord Montgomery's house, in Grafton Street, on the morning following the incidents just related; and about ten o'clock in the evening, the nobleman alighted from a plain carriage at the entrance to Covent Garden Theatre.

He was enveloped in the domino, the hood of which was drawn almost entirely over his head; and in addition to this precaution, he wore a mask. It was thus impossible to obtain the slightest glimpse of his countenance, while through the holes of the mask his eyes commanded a perfect view of the brilliant scene into the midst of which he now entered.

The only circumstance which made him fear that the trick would prove a failure, and that he could not succeed in passing himself off as Lord Florimel, was the difference in their stature; for although Montgomery was only of the middle height, yet Florimel was shorter still, and there was a probability that the keen observation of a woman would notice this fact. However, Montgomery regarded the adventure as one well worth the trial; and he had already made up his mind to play his part with the utmost caution, tact, and circumspection, in case he should really be accosted by some disguised beauty.

The interior of Covent Garden Theatre presented a scene of the most dazzling brilliancy. The pit was completely boarded over, so that a floor was formed to meet the stage; and at the end of the stage itself a full band was placed, under the direction of a celebrated leader. The arena was crowded with masques, displaying every variety of costume, every singularity of fancy dress, and every artifice to ensure

complete disguise; and the boxes were thronged with occupants, some in masquerade attire, and others in ball-dresses. The magnificent crystal chandeliers suspended to the ceiling and the candelabra projecting from around the tiers of boxes flooded the vast interior of the building with an also overpowering lustre, so that everything was penetrated, as it were, with light, and the countless beings gathered there moved about like butterflies and gorgeous insects in the noonday sun.

The music was playing, and the body of harmony, with its variations of sweetness and grandeur, pathos and excitement, seemed to fill every part of the theatre. The atmosphere was warm and perfumed, the murmuring of soft voices formed an undercurrent of sound dominated by the superior swell of the superb music, and the eye of the beholder wandered with ineffable delight over the fairy scene.

Lord Montgomery walked slowly around the arena, keeping close to the lowest tier of boxes, in order that he might command a view of all the disguised forms, male or female, that were moving about upon that elastic floor. Then he mingled in the crowd itself, exchanging jests with some and provoking witty repartees from others, but still without attracting the special notice of any particular lady.

At length, retiring from the thickest of the crowd and posting himself near the musicians, he began to scrutinize in detail all the female masques who seemed to be invested with any degree of interest.

But scarcely had he stationed himself in that spot which appeared so convenient for his survey, when an elegant female, dressed as a flower-girl, passed rapidly by him; and from behind the black satin mask which covered her countenance she darted upon him a look that seemed intended to pierce through his disguise, impenetrable though it really were.

Montgomery followed her with his eyes as she plunged into the midst of the crowd; and he saw enough of her to excite the liveliest interest in his soul. She was tall in stature, and her exquisitely modelled form appeared to be almost visible through the picturesque attire which she wore, so admirably was it fitted to her shape and so well did it develop the fluent and rounded proportions of those very contours which it concealed. The short petticoats dis-

played the sculptured delicacy of the feet and ankles and the robust swell of the legs; and on one of the white and beauteously moulded arms, which were bare, hung a basket of artificial flowers. Her hair was of a rich dark brown; and as much of the neck, throat, and bosom as met the eye of the beholder was of a dazzling whiteness. Nothing, in fine, could exceed the purity of that polished skin; nothing could be more charming than that snowy complexion which belonged to flesh evidently plump and warm with the vigorous health of youth.

Montgomery was so struck by her appearance and so ravished by the graces of her person, that he would have staked his soul upon the belief that her countenance was of a corresponding beauty. So lost in rapture was he that he seemed transfixed to the spot; and when he thought of following her, it was too late; she had disappeared amidst the thickest of the multitude of masques. But it instantaneously struck him that this must be the lady who had sent the domino and who expected to meet Lord Florimel beneath that disguise; and then, recollecting how keen was the glance which she threw upon him and how precipitate was the immediate retreat, he said to himself, " The adventure is a failure. She saw that mine was not the stature of Lord Florimel, and she has departed in mingled rage and disappointment."

But scarcely had he made this reflection, when he was startled with a thrill of ecstatic feeling that passed like an electric shock through his entire frame, on beholding the graceful Flower Girl once more issue from the crowd and approach the spot where he was standing. Her pace was now slow and her step somewhat hesitating; and even from behind that mask which formed so impervious a veil to conceal any confusion which she might have experienced, did she evidently send forth agitated glances. But the soft and graceful balancing of her gait, the floating elegance of her form, and the seductive charm of all her movements riveted the attention of Lord Montgomery; and he thought within himself that if this lady should indeed prove the heroine of the present adventure, no effort that he could possibly make to possess her ought to be spared. For to his memory rushed all the glowing descriptions which Florimel had given him of that night of mystery, love, and voluptuousness, — those

four hours of frenzied bliss, thrilling ecstasies, and burning kisses; and Montgomery said to himself, " My God! if this be the woman whose amorous proficiency plunged Florimel into a never-to-be-forgotten paradise, I would sooner lose my own soul to Satan than the chance of enjoying the mingled intoxication and delirium of her warm embraces and furious caresses."

And while these reflections swept through the brain of Earl Montgomery, the Flower Girl — for so must we denominate the charming unknown — was still advancing toward him; while he remained motionless as a statue, but devouring her with the ardent looks which he threw upon her from behind his mask. For as yet he could not be sure that she was purposely accosting him, nor was it an unmistakable certainty that he was indeed an object of attention or interest on her part. She might be moving in that direction in the abstraction of her thoughts, or she might believe him to be some one for whom she was looking, and yet not have in view the aims which he hoped and suspected.

While he was making these additional reflections, she approached within three yards of the spot where he was standing; then she passed him by at a pace so slow as to convince him that she was only seeking the leisure and the opportunity to contemplate him with attention, for her eyes, shining like twin diamonds through the mask, remained fixed upon him the whole time.

" Yes, she is the lady of this adventure," thought Montgomery within himself. " She recognizes the domino, but she hesitates because I am taller than Florimel. Would that I were of a stature as feminine as his! "

The Flower Girl passed by the nobleman and advanced as far as the music-stands at the extremity of the stage; then turning abruptly around, she again approached him, slackening her pace as she drew nearer toward the spot where he still stood motionless. It struck him that he would speak to her; but he was afraid that he could not sufficiently imitate Florimel's voice in order to deceive her, and he saw the monstrous imprudence of doing anything to strengthen the suspicion with which she already appeared to view him.

Again she passed him by, closer this time than before; and he could even catch the bright and searching looks which she fixed upon him. Yes, and he heard, too, the subdued

sigh which came from her bosom, and which seemed to torture her with a suffocating effect.

The impulse which now seized upon him was irresistible; and stepping forward, he took her hand, saying, in a low whisper, " Beauteous lady, wherefore are you unhappy? "

For an instant he felt her hand tremble even through the white kid glove which covered it. The next moment that hand was snatched back with a strange abruptness, and her looks appeared to flash through her mask, as she said, in a tone that was musically fluid though evidently feigned, " Who are you? "

" I am Lord Florimel to the world, Gabriel to you, sweet lady, whoever you may be," was the response delivered by Montgomery, in a key so soft and low that it was impossible it could either confirm or lull a suspicion as to whose voice it really was.

" You are Lord Florimel? " said the Flower Girl, her own voice now sounding so tremulously as to be scarcely audible, and the earl could perceive that her entire frame writhed as if with a sudden convulsion, but whether of frenzied joy or searching anguish he could not at the instant conjecture; for that abrupt vibration so much resembled the spasm of a bitter affliction, and yet what other feeling could influence her save a thrill of ecstasy?

" Yes, I am Lord Florimel," repeated Montgomery, still rendering his voice utterly impossible to be recognized; " and you, dearest lady — "

" Traitor! perjurer! " murmured the unknown, in a dying voice, and she appeared suddenly to stagger as if about to fall.

Montgomery, though struck with dismay at the tremendous epithets which had just been hurled at his head, stretched out his arms to save her; but this movement on his part seemed to recall her to herself in an instant, and, repelling his attentions with an evident mingling of hatred and scorn, she darted away, glided with the aerial lightness of a bayadere amidst the crowd, and was lost to his view.

" Damnation! " murmured Lord Montgomery to himself; " the adventure is spoiled, the trick is discovered, the game is lost. She perceived that I was not Lord Florimel; and as it was Lord Florimel, and Lord Florimel only, whom she was resolved to have, no substitute would answer her purpose.

But what on earth did she mean by calling me a perjurer? The word 'traitor' is intelligible enough, for it is doubtless a treacherous act to personate one's friend in a love-intrigue of so delicate a nature as this. But perjurer — perjurer — how can I be a perjurer? Perhaps she meant that I was the traitor and Florimel the perjurer; and yet he assured me that she never bound him by any oath or pledge at all. Be that, however, as it will, it is not the less annoying to experience so signal a failure in an enterprise which promised to be of so delicious a piquancy. She must assuredly be a splendid creature! What a glorious complexion, what admirably moulded arms, what a superb length of limb, and what an elegant figure! Then the bust, just ample enough to be voluptuous, and yet appearing to possess a virginal plumpness and firmness. Albeit she is no virgin, if Florimel's tale be true; and who can doubt it? Still there is about this charming being a certain maiden freshness and all that wholesome flush of youthfulness which do not bespeak a long nor an intimate acquaintance with amorous pursuits and exciting pleasures. Oh, it is enough to drive me mad with rage and disappointment, to think that I should have lost so golden an opportunity. But I may yet make my peace with her. It is not perhaps too late, and who knows what may be the result? I will plead the strength of a passion excited almost to delirium by the tale which Lord Florimel narrated; and I will reveal the whole truth, who I am, and by what stratagem I hoped to take the place of the young noble whose puritanical devotion to his Pauline would not permit him to plunge into this intrigue. Yes, let me seek the mysterious Flower Girl, and all will yet be well."

With this last reflection still traversing his brain, Lord Montgomery hastened in search of the disguised lady who had already excited so deep an interest in his heart.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE MASQUERADE — SCENE THE SECOND

We must now inform the reader of a circumstance which we did not choose to interrupt our narrative to relate before. This was, that while the Flower Girl was timidly hovering about the spot where Lord Montgomery had been posted, in the manner already related, her movements were observed and keenly, though cautiously, watched by two individuals in masquerade costume.

One was a tall and somewhat portly man, of fine proportions and robust symmetry. He was attired in a Turkish garb remarkable for the richness of its material and the elegance of its ornaments; and his countenance was carefully concealed by a black satin mask.

His companion, who was of shorter stature, was dressed in a black domino, and likewise wore a mask.

These two persons had entered the theatre almost at the same time as the Flower Girl; and as the Turk was immediately struck by the winning grace and seductive elegance of her appearance, concealed though her features were, he had followed her amidst the mazes of the crowd, though at such a distance as to avoid exciting her suspicions. His companion in the black domino kept constantly a few paces in the rear; and whenever the Turk addressed a word to him, he received the communication with the profound deference of an inferior.

From the first moment, we say, that they had caught sight of the Flower Girl, they had watched her motions, in order to ascertain whether she was altogether alone, or whether she had an appointment with some one for whom she was searching. They had seen her approach Lord Montgomery in the first instance, they had observed the

scrutinizing look which she threw upon him, and they had marked the rapidity with which she turned back and plunged again into the crowd. Then they followed her at a distance, and they perceived that she was evidently hastening away from the brilliant scene, probably with a view of quitting it altogether; and the Turk was already pressing forward to introduce himself to her notice, when she suddenly stopped short, as if some new idea had struck her, and the next moment she was retracing her way through the busy throng of masques, toward the spot where the Blue Domino (Lord Montgomery) was still standing.

The Turk and the Black Domino likewise altered their course, still bending their steps in the track of that being whose form possessed so many captivating graces as to impress upon the mind the conviction that her face must be of a corresponding loveliness.

But this time she approached the Blue Domino with a slower and more timid step, and while she was thus accosting Montgomery in the manner and with the result already described, the Turk and the Black Domino were intently observing her proceedings from the opposite side of the stage.

"By the living God, Germain," said the Turk, suddenly clutching his companion by the arm, "I never was so enchanted by the elegance, the symmetry, and the grace of a woman's form as I am at this moment. Such a creature must possess the countenance of a divinity."

"Her complexion is certainly charming, your Royal Highness," was the response given by the Black Domino.

"Her complexion!" ejaculated the Prince of Wales, who was disguised in Turkish garb. "Is that all you notice with regard to her? Look at her figure; it is as finely proportioned as that of poor Octavia Clarendon. Then her foot and ankle, and the symmetry of her leg — Oh, Germain, I must and will possess her, and 'tis for you to manage the affair for me in some way or another."

"Your Royal Highness may rest assured that if it be possible," said Germain, "this matter shall terminate according to your wishes."

"But what extraordinary coquetry is this which she is practising toward that Blue Domino?" exclaimed the prince, aside to his faithful dependent. "Look how timidly

and bashfully she hovers around him, while he does not move an inch. Surely it is some statue that is perched up there, and not a being of warm flesh and blood; else never would he remain thus apathetic while so heavenly a creature is endeavouring to win his attention."

"Your Royal Highness will pardon me," said Germain, "but he is evidently contemplating her through his mask with an absorbing interest. My opinion is that each one has got a particular appointment, and that neither is convinced that the other is the person expected."

"Yes, it must be something of that sort, Germain," observed the prince; "and the misunderstanding or uncertainty becomes every instant more embarrassing. The Blue Domino remains stationary, the Flower Girl advances timidly, and now she passes him by, and they do not speak. But this is extraordinary, Germain, and I have a very great mind to accost the fair one and propose myself as her companion."

"Your Royal Highness may spoil all by so precipitate a course," said Germain. "Let us see the result of this curious dumb-show and byplay, and be led by circumstances."

"And if the unknown charmer should find her expected beau either in that Blue Domino or in some similar masque?" said the prince.

"Then it will be difficult to bring matters to the issue desired by your Royal Highness," returned Germain. "But an idea has just struck me, may it please — "

"Well, what is this idea?" demanded the prince.

"That there is no appointment at all on the part of this lady," answered the valet; "but that she is a jealous wife or mistress, on the lookout for a faithless husband or a perfidious lover."

"Egad! the idea is not a bad one, Germain," exclaimed his Royal Highness. "But what is she doing now? She advances as far as the musicians, she turns abruptly, she retraces her way, ah! and now they speak."

"And there is evidently nothing cordial between them, your Royal Highness," observed Germain.

"Upon my word, I am not sure," said the prince; "he takes her hand — "

"And now she repulses him," added Germain. "Ah!

the interview is over; there is some disagreeable discovery — "

"Or else some very embarrassing mistake," observed the prince. "But away she goes. We must follow her, and if she should leave the theatre and take a hackney-coach or a cab, Germain — "

"I understand what to do, your Royal Highness," said the astute valet, as he followed his master in pursuit of the Flower Girl.

But here we must take leave of the Prince of Wales and Germain for the present, and return to Lord Montgomery, whom we likewise left hastening after that same mysterious lady.

Cursing his folly for having allowed a single moment to elapse ere he sped in chase of the enchanting creature, he was actually forcing his way through the crowd of masques, when a gentle hand caught him by one of the folds of his domino, and a voice of musical softness said, in a tone of timid inquiry, "Lord Florimel?"

Montgomery stopped instantaneously, but gave no immediate answer. For this circumstance threw him, all in a moment, into an unspeakable bewilderment; inasmuch as the masque who had thus accosted him was a lady of fine figure, and habited as a Circassian Slave.

Were there, then, two heroines in the present adventure? Were two fair ones in the secret of the overture made to Lord Florimel by means of the masquerade-ticket and the blue domino? Or was there some grand mistake somewhere; and if so, which was the legitimate and real heroine, the Flower Girl or the Circassian Slave?

Swift as the shadow of a flight of birds passes over a field when the sun is shining brightly did these thoughts traverse the brain of Earl Montgomery; and with the same rapidity did his eyes sweep the form of the lady who had accosted him.

And what was the result of this survey? He observed that she was quite as tall as the Flower Girl and somewhat stouter; indeed, that she possessed the embonpoint of a woman of riper age, and whose charms have acquired the luxuriant voluptuousness of maturity in place of the first freshness of youth. He noticed, therefore, that her bosom was of large proportions, but still preserving a firmness

unmarred by its fulness; and that, at all events, it was of the purest virginal whiteness. Her shoulders were well filled out, slightly rounded, and beautifully sloping; and her waist was of a symmetry properly consistent with the amplitude of this magnificent bust and the large projection of the hips. Her arms were of sculptural massiveness, but admirably moulded, round, plump, and of dazzling whiteness; and her hands were perfectly ravishing with their long taper fingers and their pellucid almond-shaped nails. Her feet and ankles were of corresponding beauty; and altogether her form, from the throat to the sole of the foot, was of a splendour and a voluptuousness which denoted a woman grandly handsome and fervently impassioned. For who could doubt that the black silk mask concealed a face whose features were in perfect keeping with the richness of contour, the fineness of proportion, and the elegance of figure which we have endeavoured to describe?

Lord Montgomery's eyes, in sweeping over the lady's person, embraced at a glance all that we have taken some minutes to delineate.

"Yes, I am Lord Florimel," he said, at length, and with a voice as effectually disguised as when he exchanged those brief and rapid observations with the Flower Girl. "And are you, lady, that same adorable but mysterious creature who fifteen months ago — "

"Hush, my lord, hush!" murmured the Circassian Slave, although Montgomery was speaking only in a whisper. "You remember the promise which I then made you — "

"Yes, that we should meet again, dear lady," continued the earl; "but an age has elapsed since then, and I began to fear that the pledge on your part would be never kept."

"Then you have wished to meet me again, Gabriel?" said the lady, in a voice trembling with ineffable emotions; and she walked slowly aside with Earl Montgomery as she thus spoke.

"Oh, how can you ask me, adorable creature?" exclaimed the nobleman, who remembered, as his looks now dwelt devouringly upon her superb form, all that Florimel had told him of the impassioned ardour and frenetic desires which animated the heroine of his four hours' enjoyment; and the earl felt his own imagination already wandering amidst those Elysian blisses which had been so faithfully

described to him, and of which the mysterious being now by his side was at the time alike the creatress and the partaker.

"I ask you whether you wished to meet me again, Gabriel," said the lady, in reply to his own ejaculatory observation, "because it is sweet to receive such an assurance, and because I must learn, ere we proceed further in the renewal of our amour, whether you are prepared to be as docile, submissive, and obedient to all I shall suggest or require as you were upon the former occasion?"

"Dearest lady, do you imagine that by word or deed on my part I would forfeit the bliss which is derived from your society?" asked Lord Montgomery, still speaking in a low and assumed tone; and it struck him that through the holes in the lady's mask came burning looks vibrating with desire.

Then, as from behind his own mask, he fixed his eyes more ardently than before upon the splendid form of the Circassian Slave, his devouring looks sought to penetrate through her very garments and feast, as it were, upon the charms of her entire person, so that in imagination did he finish and complete all the flowing lines which traced the contours of her shape, and all the inflections and swelling reliefs of her luxuriant figure, until her apparel grew diaphanous, and her whole form became visible through the transparent vesture. Then, still giving the rein to his wanton fancy, he felt as if he were already folding in his embrace that fine person and revelling in all the sensuous enjoyment of its charms; and, maddened by the desires which were consuming him, he seized her hand, murmuring in that tone of half-suffocation which is caused by extreme emotion, whether of bliss or pain, "Lady, dear lady, let us depart to thine abode of love and mystery and pleasure."

"Yes, we will hasten away from this scene which has no longer any attractions for me, since I have encountered you, my Gabriel," returned the Circassian Slave, her voice trembling with a profound sigh of pleasure.

At that moment Lord Montgomery perceived the Flower Girl standing at a little distance and evidently surveying himself and his companion with the most absorbing attention; and suspecting that her views were far from friendly if not downright mischievous, — though who she was or what her aims might be he could not, for the life of him,

conjecture, — he hastened to lead the Circassian Slave away from the busy, brilliant scene.

"Do you know that female masque who seemed to be watching us?" inquired the lady, in a voice suddenly denoting a profound agitation, as she quickened her pace.

"Who, the Flower Girl?" said Lord Montgomery, now absolutely hurrying the Circassian Slave along toward the nearest avenue of egress. "No, I do not think that she was paying any attention to us — "

"But I am certain she was," interrupted the lady, with a strong emphasis. "Ah! Florimel, 'tis some fair one who loves you, who knows that you were coming hither disguised, and who surveys me with all the rage of jealousy. Heavens, if there should be a scene, a disturbance!"

And Lord Montgomery not only felt his unknown companion's hand trembling nervously, but also observed her entire frame vibrating and quivering with alarm.

"Fear nothing, lady; we are neither watched nor followed," he said, in a tone of joyous reassurance, after having cast a rapid glance behind.

"Oh, what a weight is lifted from my soul," murmured the Circassian Slave, likewise looking hastily back and perceiving that the Flower Girl was now in earnest conversation with a female masque representing a Gipsy. "But I feel as if I should faint, Gabriel. The terror I have experienced has been cruel, and now this sudden reaction — "

"Will you not be able to reach your carriage, dearest lady?" inquired Montgomery, in a tone which evinced his alarm, although he still had the presence of mind to disguise his voice.

"No, I fear not — a faintness is coming over me — oh, for a glass of water!" murmured the Circassian Slave, now supporting herself in such a manner that her two arms were passed as it were in his own and her bosom leaned against his shoulder.

Fortunately they at this moment emerged from the midst of the masquerade scene and entered the corridor whence opened the lower tier of boxes, so that they were now comparatively free from observation, few persons being near. The air of that place likewise felt pure and fresh after the stifling warmth of the atmosphere inside; and, leaning against the wall for a few moments, the Circassian

slave appeared to recover from the languor of faintness which the heat of the theatre and the dread of detection combined to bring upon her.

But here we must leave Lord Montgomery and his unknown companion for a short space, while we return to the Flower Girl and those who were engaged in watching her movements.

CHAPTER XL

THE MASQUERADE — SCENE THE THIRD

Our readers will remember that, having thrown at Lord Montgomery those angry denunciations of "traitor" and "perjurer," the Flower Girl sped hastily away, with the apparent intention of quitting the theatre; while, on the other hand, the Prince of Wales and Germain hurried in pursuit of her amidst the bustling, thronging, laughing, chattering multitude of masques.

But again, as on the former occasion, a thought seemed to strike the Flower Girl, causing her first to slacken her pace, then to stop short, and lastly, to turn around and begin to retrace her way slowly toward the spot where she had left Earl Montgomery.

It was evident that she was tortured by some cruel uncertainty, or that her bosom was wrung by emotions of a very painful nature. Not a syllable did she reply to the various jests, some innocent enough, and others equivocal to a degree, which were addressed to her in her character of a Flower Girl. Negligently upon her beauteous arm hung the basket, and her breast heaved and fell with profound sighs that swelled almost into audible and suffocating sobs.

"I cannot make her out at all," observed the Prince of Wales to Germain. "She is decidedly as unhappy as she well can be."

"Your Royal Highness may rest assured," said the valet, "that jealousy is at the bottom of it all. See, her hands are ungloved. Can we not ascertain whether she be a married woman?"

"Your eyes are as sharp as mine, Germain," returned the prince. "But I will approach her. Ah! what beautiful

hands! How taper are the fingers! No, she does not wear a wedding ring."

"Then she is a kept mistress, perhaps," suggested Germain.

"I'll swear she is no such thing," exclaimed the heir apparent, almost indignant at the allegation, as if it positively reflected upon himself or in some way wounded his own feelings. "I am sufficiently experienced in womankind, or, to speak more delicately upon the subject, I am quite connoisseur enough in all that relates to the fair sex to be able to form some estimate of a female's rank, position, and social standing by her general deportment, her mien, her walk, her manner, and her apparel, ay, even though her countenance be masked and her dress be a fancy costume. Now, in the present instance, Germain," continued the prince, "I have observed about that charming creature a certain reserve and bashfulness, a shrinking from the contact of the multitudes around her, a sense of isolation and of a position unusually friendless and unprotected, all of which may be regarded as striking proofs that she is not accustomed to such scenes as this, and that she assuredly is not here for her amusement. She has not the effrontery of a kept mistress, and she is scarcely bold enough for a girl who is looking after a lover to whom she has surrendered her virtue. Besides, there is a virgin air about her, a perfume of innocence, as it were, an odour of chastity, combined with all that first freshness of youth which nothing in the shape of amorous pleasure has yet marred."

"Behold, your Royal Highness!" exclaimed Germain, suddenly catching his master by the sleeve, "a masque has accosted the Blue Domino."

"Ah! a Circassian Slave," said the prince. "And, by Jove! she is a splendid woman likewise. But I prefer my favourite, the Flower Girl. Where is she?"

"There," returned the valet. "She has posted herself in such a position that she can observe everything which passes between the Blue Domino with the singular braiding and the superb Circassian Slave."

"A decided case of love and jealousy," said the prince, his eyes dwelling with a gloating and devouring look upon the beauteous form of the Flower Girl. "But it is a pure love, and —"

" And therefore your Royal Highness will not molest the poor Flower Girl, who seems to be unhappy enough already? " said Germain, fancying that he had really fallen into the right track of the prince's thoughts upon the subject.

" You are mad, my good fellow," exclaimed the royal voluptuary. " So far from abandoning my designs with regard to that fair creature, I am more than ever resolved to push the adventure to a triumphant issue. If her lover in the blue domino be neglected and faithless, I will console her; and if he be insensible to the graces of her person, I will teach her the road to a terrestrial paradise. Besides, there will be the charm of novelty in this conquest."

" Your Royal Highness does not observe that the Blue Domino and the Circassian Slave are evidently talking together in an enamoured strain," said Germain; " and that the Flower Girl is watching them with a mingled intentness and agitation which menace a scene and an exposure."

" No, she is too well bred to create a disturbance, Germain," replied the prince. " I will stake my existence that such exquisite graces, such ineffable charms, such ravishing attitudes, full of modesty and elegance, do not belong to one who will go into hysterics, set up a screaming, call her treacherous lover by harsh names aloud, or tear her rival's eyes out. No, all will pass off quietly enough."

" Your Royal Highness is correct," exclaimed Germain, in a hurried whisper; " for behold, the Blue Domino and the Circassian Slave are hastening away together, and — "

" Ah! my God, the poor Flower Girl is supporting herself against the wall," cried the prince. " What an opportunity to form her acquaintance! "

And he was already darting toward her, to catch her in his arms and save her from falling, when a female masque, clad as a Gipsy, glided suddenly past him and hurried up to the Flower Girl.

The prince stopped short, muttered an oath of impatience, and then fell back a few paces to rejoin Germain.

" Your Royal Highness was anticipated in your good intentions by that Gipsy with the pretty figure and the picturesque attire," said the valet.

" Yes, perdition upon the Gipsy! " exclaimed the prince. " But the manner in which she accosted the Flower Girl seems to bespeak another phase in her adventures of this

evening, and we will continue to watch the fair one's movements for the present."

"So as to seize upon any incident which may transpire to the furtherance of our aims," added the valet.

But let us now draw our readers' attention a little more closely to the Flower Girl herself.

It was perfectly true that she was leaning against the wall for support, indeed, to save herself from sinking upon the floor, so overwhelming were the emotions under which she laboured. The deepest affliction and the heaviest weight of sorrow appeared to have fallen upon her on beholding the excellent understanding which evidently subsisted between the Blue Domino and the Circassian Slave; and when she saw them depart together, a species of vertigo seized upon her, her brain became dizzy, her sight failed her, and she felt as if all the chords which bound her immortal spirit to its mortal tenement were snapping with a fearful rapidity.

Suddenly a hand was laid gently upon her shoulder, and a soft voice said, soothingly, "Dear lady, remember where you are, command yourself, control your feelings, I implore you."

"And who are you, kind being?" asked the Flower Girl, exerting all her energies to regain her self-possession.

"I am one who knows you well," was the response, delivered in the same gentle tone as before.

The Flower Girl now regarded the Gipsy more attentively, and perceived that she was short in stature, beautifully symmetrical, and evidently young. Her face was carefully concealed by her mask; but fine dark eyes flashed through the holes, brilliant teeth were visible behind an aperture which that wizard had for the respiration, and luxuriant black hair was arranged in massive bands beneath the gipsy-hat which the female wore with a ravishing coquetry.

The eyes of the Flower Girl swept over the Gipsy in order to recognize her, if possible, by the traits of the figure, the stature, and as much as could be thus observed beneath her picturesque costume; but it was evident that the former could not call to mind any one within the circle of her acquaintance on whom she was able to fix and identify as the Gipsy.

"You know me well," said the Flower Girl, at length; "but are you equally well known to me?"

"No, lady, you are totally unacquainted with me, except

by name," was the response; " and that name," added the Gipsy, evidently endeavouring to smother a sigh, " is, alas! too well known throughout the land."

" Singular being! what mean you?" demanded the Flower Girl. " And wherefore do you interest yourself in me? Is it possible that you are the writer of — "

" That anonymous note which induced you to come hither, eh? " said the Gipsy, a certain malignity penetrating through her tone and manner, and suddenly causing the Flower Girl to regard her with a less friendly interest than before. " Well, and you have seen with your own eyes the truth of all I told you in that note? But you did wrong to accost him, after my positive injunctions to the contrary."

" There was a moment when I could not control my feelings," said the Flower Girl, now sighing profoundly at the painful recollections of all that had so recently taken place and which even now appeared to her in the light of a horrid dream, and not a reality that was patent and undeniable. " But wherefore did you enjoin me in that note not to accost him within these walls, but to deliberate calmly ere I took any step in consequence of his infidelity? Did you suppose that I possessed an almost superhuman power of control over my feelings? Or rather, let me ask wherefore you should have interfered in this matter at all? "

" Those are my secrets, lady," said the Gipsy, assuming a tone of the profoundest mystery. " And now one word of advice."

" Speak," said the Flower Girl, with a cold and unaccountable shudder, for there was something implacable and even ferocious in the altered tone and manner of the Gipsy.

" When a virtuous woman's dignity is offended by a faithless lover," was the measured response of the latter, " she does not write a long letter of mingled complaint, upbraiding, and reproach; but she pens a few laconic words, commanding him to seek her presence no more, and leaving him to calculate and weigh all the motives which have suggested a proceeding at once so dignified and so imperious."

" You have told me nothing that my own feelings as an injured woman would not have suggested," said the Flower Girl. " Have you aught more to observe, and shall I ever know who you are and what were your motives? "

"Yes, in time you shall know everything," exclaimed the Gipsy; and hurrying away, she was soon lost to the view of the Flower Girl in the thickest of the laughing, jesting, moving multitude of masqueraders.

"Now the fair one is again alone," said his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales to his faithful valet Germain, both of them having stood to observe the preceding scene from a short distance.

"The adventure draws toward a crisis, so far as the hopes and aims of your Royal Highness are concerned," replied Germain.

At this instant the Flower Girl, who had remained motionless in the deep abstraction of her feelings for nearly a minute after the Gipsy had left her, suddenly quitted the spot where she had been standing; and, avoiding the crowd as much as possible, turned from the brilliant scene.

Rapid was her pace, and with a visible anxiety to escape from the theatre did she hurry onward. Neither to the right nor to the left did she look; much less was a glance thrown behind her, and therefore she did not perceive that a man in a black domino was closely following her.

On the landing she received her cloak from the woman in charge of the superfluous apparel of the visitors; and, enveloping herself in the warm mantle, but still preserving her mask, she descended the grand staircase and passed out of the theatre.

"Now then, fast coach there!" exclaimed the driver; and up drove a vehicle, into which the Flower Girl immediately ascended. "Where to, ma'am?" was the next and last demand.

"To some respectable hotel," replied the Flower Girl, after a few moments' reflection.

"All right," ejaculated the man, banging the door and touching his hat for the silver coin which the Flower Girl dropped into his hand.

And away drove the hackney-coach; but Germain, who had arrived off his mask and domino, was seated by the side of the driver upon the box; and after a few minutes' conversation together, the valet handed five guineas to the

"ON OUR WAY TO WINDSOR CASTLE."
Photogravure from original by Merrill

name," was the response, "and that name," added the Gipsy, evidently endeavouring to smother a sigh, "is, alas! too well known throughout the land."

"Enigma being what mean you?" demanded the Flower Girl, "and wherefore do you interest yourself in me? Is it possible that you are the writer of —"

"That mysterious note which induced you to come hither, eh?" said the Gipsy, a certain malignity penetrating through her tone and manner, and suddenly causing the Flower Girl to regard her with a less friendly interest than before. "Well, and you have seen with your own eyes the truth of all I told you in that note? But you did wrong to follow him, after my positive injunctions to the contrary."

"There was a moment when I could not control my feelings," said the Flower Girl, now sighing profoundly at the painful recollections of all that had so recently taken place, and which even now appeared to her in the light of a horrible dream, and not a reality that was patent and undeniable. "But wherefore did you enjoin me to that note not to follow him, which alone could, but to deliberate calmly and I will ask no consequence of his infidelity? Did you suppose that I possessed an almost superhuman power of controlling my feelings? Or rather, let me ask wherefore you should have interested in this matter at all?"

"Those are my secrets, lady," said the Gipsy, assuming a tone of the profoundest mystery. "And now one word of advice."

"Speak," said the Flower Girl, with a cold and unaccountable shudder, for there was something implacable and sinister in the altered tone and manner of the Gipsy.

"When a woman's dignity is offended by a faithless lover," was the unmoved response of the latter, "she does not write a long letter of insipid complaint, of tears and reproach; but she pens a few laconic words, commanding him to seek her presence no more, and leaving him to ponder and smile at the motives which have induced her to act as she has done, and so im-

Photographure from original by Merrill

"ON OUR WAY TO WINDSOR CASTLE"

pressed with the feelings as an [illegible] the Flower [illegible] shall I ever [illegible] your motives?"

" Yes, in time you shall know everything," exclaimed the Gipsy; and hurrying away, she was soon lost to the view of the Flower Girl in the thickest of the laughing, jesting, moving multitude of masqueraders.

" Now the fair one is again alone," said his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales to his faithful valet Germain, both of them having stood to observe the preceding scene from a short distance.

" The adventure draws toward a crisis, so far as the hopes and aims of your Royal Highness are concerned," replied Germain.

At this instant the Flower Girl, who had remained motionless in the deep abstraction of her feelings for nearly a minute after the Gipsy had left her, suddenly quitted the spot where she had been standing; and, avoiding the crowd as much as possible, issued from the brilliant scene.

Rapid was her pace, and with a visible anxiety to escape from the theatre did she hurry onward. Neither to the right nor to the left did she look; much less was a glance thrown behind her, and therefore she did not perceive that a man in a black domino was closely following her.

On the landing she received her cloak from the woman in charge of the superfluous apparel of the visitors; and, enveloping herself in the warm mantle, but still retaining her mask, she descended the grand staircase and passed out of the theatre.

" Carriage waiting, ma'am? Hackney-coach? Cab? " cried one of the numerous hangers-on about the place.

" A hackney-coach, if you please," was the response.

" Now then, fust coach there," exclaimed the fellow; and up drove a vehicle, into which the Flower Girl immediately ascended. " Where to, ma'am? " was the next and last demand.

" To some respectable hotel," replied the Flower Girl, after a few moments' reflection.

" All right," ejaculated the man, banging the door and touching his hat for the silver coin which the Flower Girl dropped into his hand.

And away drove the hackney-coach; but Germain, who had stripped off his mask and domino, was seated by the side of the coachman upon the box; and after a few minutes' conversation together, the valet handed five guineas to that

individual, who secured them about his person, chuckling at the handsome amount of the bribe given for so easy a service as that which was required from him.

In about ten minutes the coach stopped; and down jumped Germain to open the door.

"What hotel is this?" inquired the Flower Girl, looking up and observing what appeared to be only a row of handsome private houses.

"The St. James's Family Hotel, ma'am," said Germain, officiously letting down the steps and handing the Flower Girl out of the vehicle.

Meantime the coachman had rung and knocked at the house door, which was almost instantaneously opened; and the appearance of a female servant with a candle in her hand reassured the Flower Girl, if indeed she had even for a moment entertained a suspicion that anything was wrong.

The night was piercing cold, eleven o'clock had struck, and therefore it was no wonder if Germain hurried the Flower Girl into the house; while the promptitude of his proceedings and the despatch which characterized the attentions he thus appeared to be showing to the lady, left her not an instant to ask herself who the courteous and obliging individual could possibly be. But as the light, which the female servant held in her hand, flashed upon his countenance, it instantly struck the Flower Girl that his features were not altogether unfamiliar to her. Still she had no time to pause and reflect where or when she had seen that genteel-looking man in black before; for the female servant began to lead the way up a handsome and well-lighted staircase.

The Flower Girl followed mechanically, and she had just begun to reflect that it was somewhat extraordinary that such prompt and even officious attentions should be shown her, a stranger though she were at the house and not having even opened her lips to express what she required, coming, too, alone at that hour of the night and in a masquerade dress; upon all these points had she begun to reflect, we say, and a distant suspicion had even raised its nascent glimmering in her mind, when the servant threw open the door of an apartment, saying, "Walk in, if you please, madam."

The Flower Girl paused for an instant; then, feeling how

"'AND I AM PAULINE CLARENDON.'"
Photogravure from original by Merrill

individual, who secured them about his person, chuckling at the handsome amount of the bribe given for so easy a service as that which was required from him.

In about ten minutes the coach stopped; and down jumped Germain to open the door.

"What hotel is this?" inquired the Flower Girl, looking up and observing what appeared to be only a row of handsome private houses.

"The St. James's Family Hotel, ma'am," said Germain, officiously letting down the steps and handing the Flower Girl out of the vehicle.

Meantime the coachman had rung and knocked at the house door, which was almost instantaneously opened; and the appearance of a female servant with a candle in her hand reassured the Flower Girl, if indeed she had even for a moment entertained a suspicion that anything was wrong.

The night was pretty cold, eleven o'clock had struck, and therefore it was no wonder if Germain hurried the Flower Girl into the house; while the promptitude of his proceedings and the dispatch which characterized the attentions he thus appeared to be showing to the lady, left her not an instant to ask herself who the courteous and obliging individual could possibly be. But as the light, which the female servant held in her hand, flashed upon his countenance, it instantly struck the Flower Girl that his features were not altogether unfamiliar to her. Still she had no time to pause and reflect where or when she had seen that genteel-looking man in black before; for the female servant began to lead the way up a handsome and well-lighted staircase.

The Flower Girl followed mechanically, and she had just begun to reflect that it was somewhat extraordinary that such prompt and even officious attentions should be shown her, a stranger though she were at the house and not having even opened her lips to express what she required, coming, too, alone at that hour of the night and in a masquerade dress; upon all these points had she begun to reflect, we say, and a distant suspicion had even raised its nascent glimmering in her mind, when the servant threw open the door of an apartment, saying, "Walk in, if you please, madam."

"'AND I AM PAULINE CLARENDON'"
Photogravure from original by Merrill

The Flower Girl paused for an instant; then, feeling how

ridiculous her hesitation would seem if her faint misgiving should prove unfounded, she threw her cloak upon a chair on the landing and advanced boldly forward.

The door closed behind her. She found herself in a large, handsomely furnished, and well-lighted room, and a tall figure, disguised in the garb of a Turk and wearing a mask upon his countenance, advanced to receive her.

" There must be some terrible mistake in all this," exclaimed the Flower Girl, stepping back and glancing around uneasily toward the door.

" No, charming lady," said the Turk, " there is no mistake, I can assure you. A little stratagem has been adopted, it is true, but you will pardon me, I feel convinced. And now let me introduce myself to you as Mr. Harley," added the prince, removing the mask from his features.

" And I," said the lady, whose whole frame had quivered violently when the familiar sound of the heir apparent's voice first struck upon her ears, but who had recovered all her self-command and natural strength of mind ere he had brought his speech to a conclusion, " and I," she exclaimed, slowly removing the satin mask from her own countenance, " am Pauline Clarendon."

CHAPTER XLI

THE HEIR APPARENT AND THE SISTER OF HIS VICTIM

A SUDDEN stupefaction appeared to seize upon the Prince of Wales the moment that the melodious but firm voice of Pauline breathed her well-known name and that her fair hand took the satin covering from her lovely face.

Shame and humiliation were the first feelings which he experienced as the stupor of astonishment began to subside; and then the fiendish thought suddenly struck him that as Pauline was ravishingly beautiful, there was no reason why he should not make an attempt upon her virtue.

On the other hand, the hatred which Pauline Clarendon bore toward the Prince of Wales, whom she loathed and detested as the cause of her sister's ruin and misfortune, inspired her with feelings which not only prevented her from experiencing any apprehension on account of the position wherein she was now placed, but even prompted her to seize this opportunity of unfolding her sentiments upon certain matters.

"Upon my soul, this is the most remarkable coincidence that ever happened," exclaimed the Prince of Wales, at length. "But did you not observe me at the masquerade just now, Pauline?"

"Base and black indeed must your heart be," said the young lady, every lovely lineament of her countenance expressing the magnitude of the resentment and aversion which filled her soul, "since you can so readily adopt a tone of insolent familiarity toward the sister of your victim."

"You know that I am profoundly grieved for all that has happened in respect to Octavia," said the prince; "but I really could not help it. 'Twas an ordinary case of love and gallantry, the circumstances of which afterward ex-

panded into an importance and assumed a gravity which I could neither foresee nor prevent."

"The very observations which you have just made, Prince of Wales," exclaimed Pauline, bitterly, "prove the truth of my assertion relative to the blackness and baseness of your heart."

"Your words are more than rude, young lady," said the heir apparent, biting his lip; "but I do not feel disposed to suffer them to goad me into anger. On the contrary, I had rather that you should unburden your bosom of all and everything you may have to allege against me, and then, perhaps, the calmer discourse which will follow may tend to place us upon a more friendly footing together."

"There is a certain ambiguity in the latter portion of your remarks which I do not choose to understand," said the Honourable Miss Pauline Clarendon, drawing her fine form up to its full height and assuming the dignified hauteur of a virtue conscious of its own power. "But I will avail myself of your permission," she continued, with a subdued irony in her tone, "to make a few observations on the past. Your Royal Highness has dared ere now to assimilate the case of my unhappy sister to those thousand and one instances of man's depravity and woman's weakness which are such ordinary episodes in the routine of society. But let me tell you, Prince of Wales, that in this particular amour to which I allude, the man's treachery was steeped in the blackness of Satan's own iniquity, and the woman's frailty was attended by circumstances as palliative in respect to herself as they are pathetic and touching to contemplate or describe. For Octavia loved you, loved you tenderly and devotedly, — not as the heir apparent to the British throne, but as plain, untitled, and obscure Mr. Harley. Yes, she loved you for yourself only, believing you to be a private gentleman with nothing extraordinary in your social position. On the contrary, she gave you her heart when you came to our house under circumstances calculated to engender suspicions rather than favourable notions relative to your character; for, if you choose to tax your memory with details doubtless so trifling to one in your position," continued Pauline, her tone of reproach again becoming tinctured with irony, "you will recollect the tale you told us of debts incurred for a friend and a flight from the bailiffs who sought

to arrest you for those liabilities. Well, then, it was not as a prince nor even as a rich man that Octavia regarded you when she gave you her virgin love. No, it was as a simple gentleman, whose pecuniary affairs seemed at least to be involved in embarrassment; it was as the fugitive from pursuing harpies of the law that you were thus admitted into the sanctuary of her soul. And when once you had obtained admission there, oh, how soon, how soon did you rifle that shrine of the only gem which it possessed! How prompt and how tremendous was the havoc made by your sacrilegious hand! How remorseless was the vandalism of that ruin which you left in a temple where all was bright and holy, pure and uncorrupted, until then!"

"Pauline, you know that I could not repair by marriage the injury which I had done to your sister," said the prince, somewhat touched by the young lady's reproaches, but assuming a more contrite tone and humbled manner in order to move her by that semblance of penitence and sorrow. "I confess that my conduct was wrong, very wrong, but I beseech you to consider that I was hurried on by an infatuation which I could not control, a passion which swept me along as if with the force of a torrent; and I solemnly swear, Pauline, that had Satan demanded my soul as the price of Octavia's love, I should have madly embraced the compact. Pity me, therefore, while you blame me —"

"Ah! Prince of Wales," interrupted the Honourable Miss Pauline Clarendon, "your tongue is so used to the ready utterance of passionate avowals that the same language, with a few trifling verbal alterations, serves likewise in an apologetic sense. But I am not to be deluded by your sophistry; and therefore do I tell your Royal Highness to your face that the heartless treachery practised by you toward my sister constitutes one of the blackest chapters in your life."

"Pauline, I will not hear any more," exclaimed the heir apparent, now unable to curb his wrath.

"I thought that you had generously accorded me permission to give full vent to my feelings and sentiments upon this topic," said the young lady, her rich red lips wreathing into a satirical smile.

"Proceed, then, proceed," cried the prince, subduing his impatience as well as he was able. Then to himself he said,

" By Heaven! she is ravishing in that garb, ay, and also in that angry mood; and I will gratify my vengeance for all these reproaches at the same time that I will appease the flame of this new passion which devours me."

" I have but little more to say," continued Pauline, who was too much absorbed in the engrossing topic of her sister's wrongs to observe the peculiar nature of the preoccupation which seized upon the prince while he was thus musing to himself. " But I cannot depart hence nor suffer this opportunity to escape without protesting, solemnly protesting, alike in my sister's name and in my own, against that scandalous compromise which, although my own parent was a party to it, I cannot do otherwise than denounce in the strongest terms. Alas! alas! that my infatuated father, dazzled by the false light of empty honours and ruled by the designing woman whom he has made his wife, should have consented to receive a title as the atonement and the propitiation for his outraged daughter's wrongs. But that your Royal Highness may not think so ill of me nor do me so foul an act of injustice as to suppose that I rejoice in the sudden elevation of my family to the rank of nobility, I now solemnly declare that I look with loathing, with abhorrence, and with a shame, upon this gilding which has been spread over an indelible disgrace; and while my heart sickens at the thought that my own father could accept such a compensation for so immeasurable a wrong, I likewise hold in boundless contempt that royal family who could have dared in the first instance to offer the miserable bauble of a coronet in return for the priceless gem of a woman's virtue."

" And now, Pauline, you have said all that you have to say," observed the prince, with the coolness and heartless indifference of a thorough libertine, " and you will perhaps permit me to speak. But shall we not be seated? " he asked; for throughout the preceding dialogue they had remained standing at a short distance from each other.

" No," replied Pauline; " our interview will terminate in a few minutes, and I am not so wearied that I cannot dispense with a seat while listening to anything that you may have to say."

" Be it so," exclaimed the prince, for a moment abashed, embarrassed, and even overawed by that dignity which

the young lady wore, as it were, without an effort, and which made her as a mere woman more powerful in a moral sense than he was as a prince; but casting off that strange influence which thus dominated him for nearly a minute, he said, " You have reproached me at great length for my conduct toward Octavia, and you have likewise repudiated all idea of adhesion to that species of tacit compromise which has made your father a peer. Well, I have already admitted that my behaviour in respect to your sister was improper and even cruel; and if you can show me what reparation I, as a prince, and as the heir apparent to the throne of these realms, can make, you have but to name your demand. Then, as for the compromise, I frankly and candidly acknowledge my conviction that you have spoken the truth in denouncing and disavowing it. But while I thus do justice to your own independence of spirit and virtuous indignation of feeling," continued the prince, in a tone of courteous hauteur, " I do not hesitate to declare my opinion that since your father is satisfied with the arrangements which have been made, you have no longer a right to complain. Octavia belongs to her sire, and not to her sister."

" Contemptible sophistry! " ejaculated Pauline, her beauteous countenance becoming red with indignation; and the crimson glow suffused itself over her neck and all that was visible of her virgin bosom.

" Well, it may sound like sophistry to your ears," said the prince, in an easy and familiar tone, as if he knew that not only the argument was on his side, but that he had a means in reserve of humbling that lovely girl so dignified and so strong in the consciousness of her virtue. " It is also the opinion of the world and the expression of the law that I thus enunciate; for the parent alone could commence an action for the seduction of his daughter. But let us now take leave of this subject and pass on to another. I presume you fully comprehend that it was in consequence of a stratagem you were brought hither? " said the heir apparent, with the coolest effrontery imaginable.

" I know that you are capable of any villainy, prince," returned Pauline, a slight shudder passing over her frame as she was thus reminded of the circumstances of her position at so late an hour; but, instantaneously assuming the calm demeanour of courage and self-possession, she said, " Never-

theless, bad as you are, I can scarcely suppose you capable of persevering in an evil intention toward one who turns out to be the sister of your unhappy victim."

"Candidly speaking, my dear Pauline," answered the prince, whose desires were excited almost to madness by the charms of the young lady, "I fell in love with you at the masquerade solely from the contemplation of your beauteous figure and the indescribable graces of your person; and now that your countenance beams upon me in all its glory, I am not likely to abandon the enchanting hope of possessing you, even though the removal of that mask has revealed to me the features of Pauline Clarendon."

"This language — to me!" exclaimed the young lady, once more becoming crimson with indignation, while her whole form shook as if with a strong spasm passing through it.

"Yes, to you, Pauline," cried the prince, his libidinous looks gloating upon the charms that were set off so ravishingly by the picturesque costume which displayed rather than concealed them. "And now, without hypocrisy, without subterfuge, without circumlocution, let me tell you, frankly and resolutely, that your beauty has excited me to a frenetic pitch, and that you shall be mine, be the consequences what they may."

"Villain!" ejaculated Pauline, now seriously alarmed; and she flew to the door.

"The bird escapes me not thus easily," cried the prince, in a triumphant tone, as the young maiden fruitlessly endeavoured to open the door, which had been locked on the other side. "Come, Pauline, you are a being endowed with good sense and a strong intellect, and you can listen to reason. May I crave your patience for a few moments?"

And his Royal Highness leaned against the chimneypiece with the cool complacency of a man who is certain of achieving a victory, or who has the game in his own hands.

"Reason?" ejaculated Pauline, summoning to her aid all the courage and self-possession which she now felt to be requisite to meet the dangers and difficulties of her position; and, moving slowly away from the door, she advanced toward the prince with an air of confidence which she did not, however, in reality feel. "Yes, I can listen to reason;

but I am at a loss to conceive how anything which you may have to say to me can deserve that denomination."

"We shall see," said the heir apparent. "And let me begin by informing you that I watched all your movements and proceedings ere now at the masquerade, and I saw enough to convince me that you have no reason to be satisfied with the conduct of the Blue Domino. So long as I remained in ignorance who the fair Flower Girl could be, I was of course unable to penetrate entirely into the mystery of those proceedings; but now that I know her to be the beautiful Miss Pauline Clarendon, I come to the very natural conclusion that the Blue Domino must have been her fickle, inconstant, and faithless lover, the young Lord Florimel. Ah! I see by your countenance that my surmise is correct."

"And wherefore do you thus torture me with these allusions? Wherefore do you seek to probe the anguish which so much perfidy has excited in my breast?" exclaimed Pauline, in an impassioned tone, and the tears started forth upon her long lashes while her bosom heaved and fell convulsively.

"I was about to observe, my dear Pauline," resumed the prince, "that —"

"Your Royal Highness will be pleased to forbear from addressing me with a familiarity not warranted by circumstances," said the young lady, in a resolute tone.

"Well, then, I will call you the Honourable Miss Pauline Clarendon, your father being a peer," observed the prince, with a satirical smile.

"Proceed, proceed," cried the young maiden, impatiently. "I am anxious to depart hence. What more has your Royal Highness to say to me, for as yet I have heard none of the reason to which you requested me to listen."

"Because you have interrupted me," rejoined the prince. "For I was about to observe that as Lord Florimel has evidently proved faithless to you, and as his conduct was positively outrageous and cruel to a degree, it is impossible that you, a young lady of high spirit and independent disposition, can tamely submit to so gross an insult as to behold your rival, whoever she might be, preferred before your very face, ay, and in defiance of anything that you may have said to the young nobleman when you accosted him so abruptly and then quitted him in such evident anger.

What, then, should you do to be avenged upon the perfidious Florimel, and which species of vengeance would be the most complete? Can you not understand me, Pauline? If not I must speak more plainly, and in measured words and intelligible language must I recommend that you retaliate in the same spirit and after the same fashion. Become my mistress, accept my protection, and then, when dashing around the park in your splendid equipage, or seated in your box at the opera, you may look scorn, defiance, and contempt at the faithless Florimel."

"Wretch!" exclaimed Pauline, in a tone vibrating with the terrible indignation which convulsed her entire form and made her face, her neck, and her bosom turn the hue of a peony all in a moment; "wretch! is it possible that you can hold such language to the sister of the too confiding girl whom your villainy has robbed alike of her virtue and her intellects? Oh, if I did not interrupt you ere the sentence which contained the odious proposition was completed, if I did not burst forth at once in all the fury of my outraged and insulted spirit, it was that amazement paralyzed my tongue. Almighty God, is it possible — oh, is it possible that this man shall one day reign over the people of England?"

"Yes, by Heaven, will I, for you and all the people of England together were made to become my slaves," exclaimed the prince, yielding to a sudden access of rage. "And now, Miss Pauline Clarendon, the prude, the pattern maiden, the chaste damsel *par excellence*, I will teach you that what I have said is true, and that you were born to be subservient to my desires. No more of your sentimental trash concerning your sister; for your father has reaped his reward. Yes, and even as a barony sufficed as an atonement for Octavia's defoliated virtue, an earldom will be clutched by him as ample recompense for Pauline's honour."

"Ah! you throw off the mask completely, prince? You proclaim yourself a villain?" cried Pauline, speaking in a tone which sounded like that of calm defiance, but which was really that of despair. "No, you cannot mean to perpetrate such an outrage. Besides, even if you should attempt it, I will resist until the very death. I will alarm the house, my screams shall rouse the neighbourhood, or, as a last resource, I will leap from the window."

And as she uttered these words in a voice which had risen from the dull tone of despair to the excitement of an hysterical frenzy, she sprang toward the casement, tore aside the curtains, and rushed into the recess to throw open the window. But her hands only encountered the shutters, and she felt that the iron bar which went across them was fastened with a padlock.

Staggering back into the room, baffled, disappointed, and with an increasing terror gaining upon her, the unhappy Pauline vainly endeavoured to recall her self-possession. The laugh of the prince rang half-triumphantly, half-mockingly in her ears, and a voice seemed to whisper in her soul that she was undone.

"My dear girl," said his Royal Highness, who was still lounging negligently before the fire and had not moved a step to retain her when she flew so wildly toward the window, "you must think me very foolish, indeed, if you imagine that the smallest avenue of escape is left for you. No, no; though ignorant that I had to deal with a stubborn and obstinate prude, yet I came hither with all imaginable speed to make preparations for your arrival, the moment I saw you safely ensconced in the hackney-coach and my faithful Germain mounted on the box."

"Ah!" ejaculated Pauline, "methought that man's face was not unfamiliar to me. But, O God! have mercy upon me," she cried, clasping her hands in despair, "for the wickedness of my persecutors is triumphing in every point."

"And the conquest will be speedily achieved, dearest Pauline," exclaimed the prince, "despite of your screams, your entreaties, your resistance. But rather, oh, much rather would I that you should come a willing sacrifice to my arms, tender, yielding, and submissive, obedient to that destiny which you cannot resist, making a merit of necessity, and abandoning yourself to the full enjoyment of those ecstatic pleasures —"

"Oh, horror!" moaned the unhappy girl, sinking upon her knees and still clasping her hands with the wildness of despair. "What, will no one come to my assistance? Is it possible that these walls can beat back my screams, my cries for help —"

"Pauline, you must be mad to hope for succour in this house," interrupted the prince, with a smile of almost

fiendish satisfaction; " for if you have not already guessed that you are an inmate of the hospitable dwelling of Mrs. Brace — "

" Mrs. Brace! " repeated the wretched Pauline, springing from her knees to her feet as if she were suddenly electrified; for well she knew that fatal name in connection with her beloved sister's ruin. " O God! have mercy upon me! " she exclaimed, and then, obedient to the impulse of feelings worked up to a pitch of the most excruciating anguish, she burst forth into screams which would have pierced through the thickest dungeon wall.

" Peace, silly fool! " cried the prince, now rushing forward and winding his arms around her form. Then, straining her with a species of maddening and ferocious violence to his breast, he exclaimed, " I will stifle thy shrieks with kisses."

And as he glued his lips, hot and parched with the fever of burning lust, to her delicious mouth, her senses abandoned her, and she remained powerless and inanimate in his arms.

CHAPTER XLII

THE HACKNEY-COACH AND THE PRIVATE CARRIAGE

GRIEVED as we are to leave the reader in a state of suspense relative to the issue of the adventure of Pauline Clarendon and the Prince of Wales, we must nevertheless break the thread of that episode for a short space and return to Covent Garden Theatre.

We left Lord Montgomery and the Circassian Slave at the moment when, having issued from the scene of the masquerade, they stopped in a corridor to enable the lady to breathe the fresh air which circulated in that place.

Speedily recovering, and no longer requiring any beverage to quench a thirst that had for a moment seemed intolerable, the Circassian Slave took Montgomery's arm again, and they now proceeded to quit the theatre. Down the grand staircase they went, that man wrapped in the mystery of the blue domino, and that woman whose splendid form was set off to such brilliant advantage by the Oriental garb that she wore. And Lord Montgomery felt proud as well as happy in the companionship of this superb creature, the flexible grace and soft voluptuousness of whose entire figure attracted the gaze of the loungers upon the stairs and in the vestibule; and as he felt her bosom press gently against his shoulder, he hastened his pace — her own, of course, at the same time — in order to be alone with her as speedily as possible.

"Is your carriage in attendance, dear lady?" he asked, in the same low and assumed tone which he had all along adopted.

"Not here, Gabriel," was the softly uttered response. "We must take a hackney-coach in the first instance."

"Be it so, dear lady," observed the nobleman. "But have you no cloak to protect yourself against the cold?"

"Ah! I forgot, 'tis upon the landing above," said the Circassian Slave, stopping short at the foot of the staircase as she thus spoke. "Here is the duplicate ticket which I received from the woman who takes charge of the cloaks."

"One moment and I will return," said Lord Montgomery; and, taking the little piece of pasteboard, he hastened up the staircase.

The next instant a tall footman in dark livery accosted the Circassian Slave, and with a respectful salutation, said, "Is the carriage to take up your ladyship here?"

"No, Mason," immediately replied the Circassian Slave. "You will wait for me in Great Russell Street, close by the British Museum; and you will be upon the watch for a hackney-coach. I shall not be alone, and you will adopt with promptitude all the necessary precautions."

The lady spoke with a peculiar significancy, which the domestic evidently comprehended full well; and, touching his hat, he instantaneously disappeared. In a few moments Lord Montgomery rejoined the lady, over whose shoulders he threw the handsome cloak which he had been to fetch, and the forgetting of which was a mere stratagem on her part in order to gain the opportunity of issuing her commands to the footman relative to the carriage.

Enveloped in her mantle and leaning upon Montgomery's arm, she now issued from the theatre; and, a hackney-coach being summoned, the disguised pair entered it together.

"Where to, sir?" demanded the driver, addressing the nobleman.

"Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury, and stop opposite the Museum," the lady hastened to reply; and away went the coach.

"Oh, my dearest friend," murmured Lord Montgomery, now taking the plump, warm hand of his companion and pressing it fervently in his own, "how can I sufficiently thank you for thus remembering me and condescending to renew the ineffable delights of that first occasion when you made me so supremely happy. Ere now in the theatre I had no time to express to you all the gratitude I experience, all the raptures which you have excited in my soul, all the bliss which you have poured into my heart. But now,

the first moment that we are really alone together, I hasten to give you the fondest, tenderest, and most fervid assurances of gratitude, love, adoration. Oh, lady, never have I forgotten, even for an instant, those four hours of Elysian enjoyment which I tasted in your arms; and my soul can scarcely believe that so much happiness is in store for it once again, but trembles lest it should awaken from a delicious dream and find all the ecstatic thoughts which now fill it oozing rapidly away, and all the warmth of its blissful emotions turning into the iciness of a stern disappointment."

In this strain did Earl Montgomery continue to speak for some time, his purpose being to postpone as long as possible that moment so perilous to his hopes and his entire stratagem, when the truth must be revealed and the tremendous discovery would be made that he was not Lord Florimel. For he had already calculated that if he were only allowed the leisure and the opportunity to excite the passions of this woman whose nature was so ardent and whose desires were so uncontrollable, he would be certain to carry out his adventure to a successful issue and triumph over any feeling of anger or alarm which the discovery of the imposture might raise up in the bosom of the wanton lady. In a word, his purpose was to reduce her to the absolute necessity of accepting himself as a substitute for the lover whom she hoped to meet; and as he pretty well guessed that the ride in a hackney-coach to Great Russell Street was only one of the many precautions which the crafty lady was wont to adopt, and that some other vehicle would receive them at that spot in order to convey them elsewhere, he calculated that it would be far more conducive to the success of his scheme to maintain the cheat until they were within close vicinage of their ultimate destination, wherever it might be.

And fortunate, perhaps, was it for the success of the earl's stratagem that the lady had taken the hired vehicle in the first instance. For had she at once entered her own carriage in company with Montgomery, she would have instantaneously taken off her mask and torn the satin vizard likewise away from his countenance, in order to pour forth her voluptuous soul in the caresses which she would have lavished upon him. His whiskers would then have revealed to her all in a moment that he was not the young

nobleman whom she had hoped and expected to meet; and in the first fury of her rage, terror, and disappointment, she might have indignantly ordered the intruder to quit her carriage, a command which, as a gentleman, he would have been bound to obey.

Such might have been the sudden result of the adventure had the private carriage been used in the first instance. But, as it was, the Circassian Slave did not think it worth while to disturb her own mask immediately, inasmuch as it would be necessary to resume it again on passing from the hackney-coach to the carriage. She accordingly restrained her longings to press her lips to those of her companion; and, contenting herself by reclining her head on his shoulder and abandoning her hand to his pressure, she listened in a dreamy and sensuous rapture to the glowing language which he poured into her ears with all the deep tenderness of his whispering voice.

In a little less than ten minutes the hackney-coach stopped; and Montgomery heard some one say to the driver, "You need not get down, I will open the door, and here is your fare."

Immediately afterward the door of the hackney-coach was opened by a tall man who had on a great coat such as was worn in those times by footmen in livery; and his hat was put on in such a way as to shade his countenance. Montgomery instantly remembered the tall lackey mentioned by Lord Florimel, and felt convinced that this was the same.

The moment the door of the vehicle was opened, the Circassian Slave hastened to alight, and the earl immediately followed her. The instant his feet touched the pavement, he darted a rapid glance up and down the street, to ascertain if a carriage were in attendance; and he had just time to observe that there was an equipage standing in the deep shade thrown by the gateway of the British Museum, when the hood of his domino was pulled completely over his mask and he was thus involved in utter darkness. At the same moment he heard the hackney-coach drive away; and he was then hurried along toward the spot where he had observed the carriage standing.

The vigorous arms which thus dealt so unceremoniously with him again reminded him of Lord Florimel's history,

and seemed to confirm his belief that the man in the greatcoat and the slouched hat was the same tall footman who figured in that narrative.

Into the carriage was he now promptly hoisted; and as the door closed behind him, he was received in the arms of the lady, who had already taken her place in the vehicle.

"My own dearest Gabriel," she exclaimed, in a tone full of passion and joy and anxious longing, as the carriage drove rapidly away, "we may now embrace each other and exchange kisses of love and tenderness."

And as she thus spoke, she threw back the hood of Montgomery's domino, tore the mask from his countenance, and glued her lips to his mouth with all that frenzied ardour and devouring fury which Lord Florimel had so glowingly described.

"Pardon, pardon, dearest lady," murmured the earl, straining her to his breast.

"O God! who are you?" she cried, with a faint shriek; and tearing herself from his arms, she appeared to fall back upon the opposite seat in a state of utter annihilation.

The nobleman fell upon his knees in the carriage and took her hand, which was abandoned to him as if by one in a dream or in a mood of utter listlessness. He pressed it to his lips, and he felt that it was warm, although it trembled not nor indicated any emotion on the part of its owner. But that she had not fainted he could tell by its soft, warm contact; and, moreover, he heard the low but quick and stifling manner of her respirations. The interior of the vehicle was dark as pitch; but by all that we have just explained, the earl judged that the lady must have fallen into that state of mingled despair and bewilderment which occasions a total helplessness.

"Pardon me, adorable woman, pardon me," he exclaimed, throwing as much tender entreaty as possible into that manly tone which he no longer sought to disguise. "It is true that Lord Florimel kneels not at your feet, but he who has taken his place and now implores your compassion, your forbearance, your mercy, is as honourable a man. And what is more, I may without vanity declare that in personal appearance I am not deficient in some of nature's bounties. Whether my manners are those of a vulgarian or a gentleman, I leave you to judge; and as for my rank, it

is even superior to that of Lord Florimel. But if you would ask me whether I can appreciate as well as he the full amount of that happiness which is to be enjoyed in your society, if you should entertain any misgivings with regard to the obedience I may be disposed to pay to the terms and conditions you will impose upon me, and if you doubt the prudence of trusting yourself to a stranger under circumstances so strange, oh, I beseech you to be reassured on those points, I implore you to place your confidence in me, and you will render me the happiest as well as the most devoted of mortals."

As Lord Montgomery was giving utterance to this impassioned address, he gradually drew himself in closer contact with the lady who was half-sitting and half-reclining on the seat. He leaned softly toward her, he passed his left arm gradually around her form, still retaining her hand clasped in his right, and he at length approached his own countenance to her burning cheek. Then at last he felt her whole frame vibrate; and drawing her still more closely toward him, he ventured to fasten his lips to hers.

For a few moments she appeared to abandon herself to the ecstatic feelings with which that long and sensuous kiss inspired her; but, as if all in a moment awakening to a full sense of her position with a stranger and to a keen appreciation of the infamous trick which had been played upon her, she started from the earl's embrace and repulsed him violently, exclaiming, in a tone profoundly troubled, "Who are you?"

"I am a friend of Lord Florimel, dear lady," was the response delivered in a voice of tender appeal and mournful entreaty; "and I happened to be at his house when the masquerade-ticket and the domino arrived. The conversation which ensued led him to narrate the adventure of love and mystery that happened to him fifteen months ago; and when he declared that his engagement to the Honourable Miss Pauline Clarendon would not permit him to keep the appointment so unmistakably signified through the medium of the masquerade-ticket and the blue domino, the idea struck me that if he were so stoical as to refuse the bliss of heaven I would at least make a desperate effort to secure that enjoyment for myself."

"And was he privy to your imposture? Did he lend him-

self to your treachery?" demanded the lady, in a low, deep tone which afforded no indication of the feeling that she now entertained toward the earl, neither encouraging him in hope nor yet confirming him in despair; and as the darkness of the tomb prevailed in the vehicle, he had no means of judging her emotions save by her voice, which thus suddenly ceased to be an index.

"No, lady," he said, in answer to her question. "Lord Florimel is utterly ignorant of my present proceeding, and I hope to God that he will remain so. Intimate as I am with him, it was easy for me to obtain possession of this blue domino; and I trusted to my own prudence and your kindness for the rest. And will you not believe me when I assure you that, although I have not seen your features and am never likely to obtain a glimpse of them, yet that I already love you with an ardour, oh, with an ardour which would make me undertake any enterprise and dare any peril to render you a service, while not even the temptation of a sovereign crown should induce me to do you harm. Permit me, then, to love you, my worshipped unknown, permit me to be thy slave, thou being so full of mystery. For the graces of thy form have captivated my heart and ravished my senses, and I already picture to myself a countenance of corresponding beauty. Without, therefore, even beholding that countenance, I can love thee well, oh, well, dear lady; for I can paint in imagination those features which I deem fit and suitable for one possessing so noble a form, and thus my happiness will be complete. Will you, then, scorn such a love as this? Will you reject a passion so earnest, so tender, and so profound? No; but you will pardon me for anything savouring of treachery that there may have been in my conduct, you will forgive me for the imposture which I practised in order to obtain this introduction to thee. For my imagination was so inflamed by the narrative which I received from the lips of Lord Florimel that I was absolutely tortured with an excruciating curiosity to form thine acquaintance, yes, and maddened with a burning desire to obtain thy love. My crime, then, has been to adore thee from hearsay, to worship thee on account of all I heard concerning thee from another; and surely there is something delicately flattering and touchingly complimentary in all this, which would disarm even the

most imperious and haughty woman of her indignation. Speak, lady, oh, speak, and tell me what I am to expect; but remember that this passion which I now experience is stronger than myself, and terrible indeed would prove its disappointment and its despair."

At the moment when Earl Montgomery commenced this long address, the lady had withdrawn herself altogether from the slightest contact with him. Not a portion of her Oriental garb touched his blue domino, at least, so far as she could prevent such contiguity in the total darkness of the carriage. But by degrees as he spoke, and his voice gradually grew more tender, his language more impassioned, and his manner more appealing, he insinuated himself closer and closer to the Circassian Slave; and she evidently became interested in his speech and evinced a soft yielding in her own conduct, by not withdrawing herself in proportion as he drew nearer to her. Thus was it that his hand presently touched her own, and the earl felt every nerve in his frame vibrate with pleasure at the warm contact. Then he took that hand, and gently, gently he sank down until he was upon his knees again, and he pressed the hand to his heart as he continued in the fervid strain which we have described.

By degrees he felt the hand trembling in his own, then the arm was more completely abandoned to him; and gradually did he become aware that the entire form of the lady was approaching nearer and nearer toward him. At length her breath fanned his cheek, he could even hear the pulsation of her heart as its beating indicated the trouble of conflicting emotions, and in a few instants a smooth forehead was laid upon his own. Then with apparent timidity did he circle her waist with his arms; and as the last words of his impassioned appeal fell from his lips, she threw herself upon his breast, murmuring, in a faint and tremulous tone, "Yes, I pardon thee, I pardon thee."

Ecstatic was the thrill of triumph which passed through the form of Montgomery as these words fell upon his ears; and in the next moment, burning was the kiss which he imprinted upon the moist, plump mouth of his charming unknown. And he felt her entire person undulate with a soft, gradual, and sensuous writhing, as that kiss seemed to pour floods of transport in unto her soul; while low and

scarcely articulate accents of pleasure escaped in a continuous billing murmur from her lips, so that the depths of this ardent woman's passion resembled the cord of a harp which curls with a wavy movement and gives forth a gentle humming sound when thrown upon the scorching hearth.

But all of a sudden the mysterious unknown seemed to recollect herself again and once more recover at least a considerable portion, if not the whole, of her presence of mind; for gently but firmly disengaging herself from the nobleman's embrace, she said, " You have not yet told me who you are."

" Lady, it was an oversight, but unintentional, I can assure you," returned the patrician; " for, if you will remember, I alluded to my rank when I declared it to be superior to that of Lord Florimel."

" Then, without further preface, who are you? " demanded the lady, in a somewhat peremptory tone.

" I am the Earl Montgomery," was the response.

It seemed to the nobleman that a strong spasm shook the lady's form as he thus proclaimed himself; at least, he fancied that he caught that abrupt kind of start which is perceived in the midst of an intense darkness only by the sudden rustling which it occasions to the dress. But he was not sure; and as a profound silence and a complete immovability instantaneously followed on the part of the lady, he began to think that he must have been mistaken, and that instead of the announcement of his name and rank having produced any particular effect upon her, she was even now meditating what course she ought to pursue.

" She doubtless knows me by reputation," he thought within himself, " and she mistrusts me. She has perhaps heard that I am dissipated, gay, addicted to women, and loose in money matters, and she trembles at the idea of pushing this adventure any further. It is even possible that she may know me, that we are acquaintances, that we have met in the saloons of fashion, and that she entertains an antipathy toward me, or a dread that I should discover who she is. And yet I have not the slightest suspicion who she can be. But then, I am acquainted with so many ladies of splendid figure, and, moreover, those whom I have been accustomed to see in their ordinary apparel would appear in a different light and to greater or lesser advantage

in the fancy costume of a Circassian Slave. No, assuredly I cannot think of any one, within the range of my acquaintance, whom I can identify with my mysterious companion. Or rather, I remember a dozen whose superb forms would probably look equally well if similarly attired. But how can I pick out one of those and fix upon her as my unknown charmer opposite? No, all is mystery in that respect; and whether we are indeed known to each in the glittering world of fashion, or whether we are total strangers, her secret seems safe enough. Why, then, does she thus appear to hesitate?"

These reflections occupied about a minute, during which the Circassian Slave continued silent and motionless, as if she were plunged in the profoundest reverie.

"And you are Eugene Montgomery?" she at length said, with so peculiar an expression in her tone that the earl could not for the life of him at the moment determine whether it were indicative of satisfaction, swayed by astonishment, or influenced by vexation. "I have heard of your lordship, yes, I have heard of you — and report represents you as somewhat wild and unsteady. But still, you are handsome, yes, very handsome, Eugene," she continued, her voice suddenly becoming kind and tender beyond all possibility of mistake; "and your nature is fervid and impassioned. Oh, then let me hesitate no longer," she cried, in a gushing enthusiasm of voice, manner, and feelings, "but let me devote myself to love and pleasure, with you as my companion. Yes, Eugene, I pardon you for the perfidy which you practised in order to be received as a substitute for your friend; and I rely upon your honour that Lord Florimel shall remain ignorant of all this. Not that he is now anything to me, or ever was, otherwise than as the object of a transitory caprice which seized upon me fifteen months ago and which revived again this week. Nor do I dread discovery; for the precautions I adopted with him, and shall adopt this night with you, defy the utmost keenness of penetration and the deepest searching of curiosity. Nevertheless I would not that these adventures should become a common topic of conversation, inasmuch as they might be alluded to in my presence and cause me to experience a temporary confusion. If, then, you be really grateful for the pardon which I have accorded you, Eugene, and if you

only entertain toward me one hundredth part of all those impassioned feelings which you ere now depicted so eloquently, you will swear to maintain an inviolable secrecy respecting the incidents of this night."

"I swear, beloved lady," exclaimed Lord Montgomery. "Besides, you have this guarantee, that I do not wish to forfeit Florimel's friendship, which I should assuredly do were he to discover the part that I have played toward you and which he little expected or intended his narrative to suggest. And now, dear lady, are you satisfied?"

"Yes, Eugene, perfectly," was the reply; "and thus do I convince thee of the sincerity of my word," she added, throwing herself into his arms and abandoning herself to his fervid caresses.

Almost immediately afterward the carriage stopped, and in an instant did the lady draw the hood of the domino over the earl's head and tie a silk handkerchief around it in such a manner that neither the night breeze nor any movement on his part could throw that cowl back.

The door of the vehicle was opened. The Circassian Slave descended first, and, guided by her hand, Lord Montgomery followed. Then ensued precisely the same circumstances which Lord Florimel had detailed in that particular portion of his narrative which referred to his own introduction to the lady's abode of love and mystery. For the Circassian Slave now led Earl Montgomery hastily forward; a gate closed behind them, on they went, and it struck him that they were threading the gravel walk of a garden or similar enclosure. In a couple of minutes they paused; the lady let go his hand for a moment, he heard a key turn in a lock, a door opened, his hand was again taken in a warm grasp that gave him a reassuring pressure, they entered some building, and once more did the lady pause to shut and fasten the door behind them. She then conducted him up a staircase so thickly carpeted that even the clumsiest boots and the heaviest footsteps must have passed noiselessly over it; and finally he was escorted along a passage into a chamber the atmosphere of which was warm and perfumed.

There must we leave the nobleman and his mysterious but enchanting companion for the present.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE MURDERESS AND HER ACCUSER

WHILE Pauline Clarendon and the Prince of Wales were brought into contact, on the one hand, and while Lord Montgomery was in the carriage with the unknown lady, on the other, an incident of a very different nature occurred on this night of multiform adventures.

Mrs. Brace was seated alone in her parlour, pondering upon many things, and from time to time cheering her spirits with some excellent Madeira, when Harriet suddenly made her appearance with a countenance as pale as death.

"What, in Heaven's name, is the matter?" inquired the milliner, starting from her seat and instantaneously catching the infection of her abigail's dismay.

"That dreadful man — who was here the other morning — and who would not give his name — but who looks like a constable," gasped Harriet, almost suffocated by the terror that was upon her.

"Ah! what can he possibly want?" murmured Mrs. Brace, in a dying tone; and a horrible sensation coming over her, she clung to the mantelpiece for support.

"My God! my God!" exclaimed Harriet, hysterically, and wringing her hands at the same time; "what shall we do?"

"For Heaven's sake, compose yourself," said the milliner, all in a moment, nerving herself with the courage of despair. "I know who he is: 'tis Mobbs, and he is accessible to bribery. Besides, if he has come alone, he means no mischief."

"Yes, he is alone," observed Harriet, catching eagerly at the hope which her mistress thus suddenly held out;

" and he spoke civilly enough when he asked to see you, ma'am."

" Then introduce him at once, and fear nothing," said Mrs. Brace, assuming a tone of firmness and assurance.

The lady's maid quitted the room; and during the few instants that the milliner remained alone, she exerted all the energy of her nature to tranquillize her feelings and compose her looks. For, in spite of the soothing words which she had spoken to Harriet, and with which she had even essayed to cheat herself into a belief of thorough security, a tremendous misgiving nevertheless lay like a weight of lead upon the guilty woman's soul. She felt a pain in the chest, a singular sensation, like that of collapse, in the stomach, and a tingling in all her limbs; and when she drew a long breath, it seemed as if she were struggling to throw some heavy load off her. These were the symptoms of her awful alarm, the tortures which conscience inflicted upon her; and despite the almost superhuman efforts which she made to conquer these feelings, it was in a horrible state of mind, though with a somewhat tranquillized countenance, that she met the looks of Mobbs as he appeared upon the threshold of her apartment.

The man was dressed in his drab greatcoat, wore his slouching hat, carried a short but thick stick in his hand, and was followed by the ugly mongrel dog which went about with him when he was not very particularly engaged. Altogether, he looked a much greater ruffian than nine-tenths of the London rogues and rascals who were wont to tremble at his name; and a glacial shudder passed through the milliner's entire form, penetrating even to the marrow of her bones, as she beheld his sinister eyes settling upon her with a frightful significancy.

And Mobbs saw how she quailed beneath his look and how her body writhed with the paroxysm of a profound and searching terror; and he said within himself, " The Gallows' Widow was right, and the milliner is a murderess."

" Walk in, Mr. Mobbs, and sit down," said the wretched woman, straining every nerve to seem composed, but enduring tortures so horrible that every instant appeared an age, and she felt as if she must either give vent to her excruciating sensations in a piercing scream or else be suffocated by the endeavour to subdue her emotions.

"How are you, ma'am?" said Mobbs, in his usual growling tone. "Come here, you ugly thief, will ye?" he cried, thus elegantly apostrophizing his dog, and bestowing a kick on the animal at the same time. Then, closing the parlour door, he advanced into the room and took a seat near the fire, saying, as he chucked his hat upon the carpet, "It's a cold night, ma'am."

"Then you shall take something nice and warm, Mr. Mobbs, to comfort you," exclaimed the milliner, slightly gathering courage from the familiarity of his conduct; but as she placed the spirit bottles upon the table her hand shook visibly and her whole frame trembled with the same nervous agitation.

"Thank'ee, ma'am, I'll help myself to a drop of brandy," said Mobbs; and as he spoke he more than half-filled a tumbler with the potent spirit, adding a very moderate quantity of hot water and thrusting his dirty fingers into the sugar-basin to extract a couple of the largest lumps.

"And now what has brought you hither this evening, Mr. Mobbs?" inquired the milliner, affecting to be busily employed in snuffing the candles, in order that she might avert her countenance as she spoke. Then, although the words half-suffocated her to give utterance to them, she said, "Any tidings of your friend Mr. Grumley?"

"Well, not exactly, ma'am," returned Mobbs, exhaling that peculiar sigh of pleasure which with many persons follows a draught of some strong and agreeable beverage; "leastways, I can't say as yet."

"Ah! then you think you have obtained some clue respecting him?" cried Mrs. Brace, still keeping her countenance turned from Mobbs; for she felt that the agonies of her suspense might be read in the workings of her features.

"Well, to speak candidly, I think I have, ma'am," said Mobbs; and he emptied his tumbler.

"Won't you take some more? Pray help yourself, Mr. Mobbs," exclaimed the milliner, assuming her most winning tone; and, turning toward him, she threw her agitated looks upon his countenance.

"Thank'ee, ma'am, I'll help myself," he said, meeting her glance and observing that she recoiled from it with a shrinking that extended to her innermost being. "But you was asking me about Grumley, poor Peter Grumley,"

he continued, in his cold, implacable voice; "and I was telling you as how I had obtained, or fancied I'd obtained, a clue to him."

"And knowing that I felt interested in the matter, you kindly came to acquaint me with the circumstance, is it not so?" said the milliner, nerving herself with that desperate courage which seeks a relief from suspense even at the risk of learning the worst at once.

"Well, ma'am, I can't exactly say it was in such a humour that I called to-night," responded Mobbs, again fixing his eyes most suspiciously upon her; "for the truth is, and the truth may be as well told at once —"

"Oh, certainly," cried the woman, sinking upon a chair with a feeling as if her senses were abandoning her. "The truth —"

"Is that I have reasons to entertain suspicions, ma'am," continued Mobbs, leaning forward as he spoke.

"Ah! suspicions — is it possible?" murmured Mrs. Brace, in a dying tone.

"Yes, suspicions of the strongest nature," proceeded Mobbs, his tone and looks every instant becoming more ominous.

"Against whom?" gasped the milliner, as if her very life depended upon the answer.

"Against you!" was the terrific response.

A strong spasm shook the wretched woman from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet, and the natural colour quitting her cheeks and leaving the rouge upon the marble flesh rendered her positively ghastly. Her livid lips moved quiveringly with the vain attempt to articulate a few words; her voice remained, as it were, in her throat, held back by an irresistible weight and accompanied by a suffocating sensation. Frozen with dread horror, struck motionless by a tremendous consternation, she sat gazing with haggard eyes upon that ill-looking countenance which was opposite to her, and on which she read an expression of mingled malignity and fiendish cunning.

Ineffable was the anguish endured by the milliner for upwards of a minute. Whole ages of excruciating torture seemed to be condensed into that space. Though awfully aware of the necessity of saying something in reply to the terrific accusation made against her, she could not give utter-

ance to a word; and though equally alive to the appalling fact that her looks were confirming all the man's suspicions, she was utterly unable to compose her features or even assume the most distant semblance of outraged innocence.

A far less intelligent man than Mobbs would have read guilt written on her features, proclaimed by her looks, and apparent in her manner, as plainly as if the word were stamped with a searing-iron upon her brow. He was accordingly convinced, beyond all possibility of doubt, that the Gallows' Widow had placed him upon the right scent; but he did not wish to act with a precipitation that should lead to an immediate explosion. Indeed, it formed no part of his plan to urge matters to an exposure at all; and therefore he did not contemplate extreme measures with regard to the unhappy woman. He knew that she was rich; and it had been already settled between himself, the Gallows' Widow, and Carrotty Poll that the knowledge of Mrs. Brace's tremendous secret should be made the means of extorting considerable sums of money from her. This was a game which suited Mr. Mobbs much better than getting himself restored to office by giving publicity to the murder and thereby explaining the real cause of Grumley's disappearance. Therefore, what he now aimed at was to penetrate into the very depths of the milliner's secret and ascertain how she had disposed of the corpse of her victim, so that he might get her completely into his power and make her purse a constant source of supply for his own behoof by holding her crime in terror over her head.

Such were the man's calculations; and accordingly, when he had suffered her to endure all the poignancy of that alarm which was certain to render her as docile and submissive as his purposes required, he said, in a tone through which he only suffered his meaning to penetrate dimly and ambiguously, " You see, ma'am, that it's of no use to deny the thing, and therefore you'd better make a friend of me."

The milliner started as if from a hideous dream. For her imagination, so intensely tortured, had pictured nothing less than the very worst, — her immediate arrest, a full exposure, the horrors of Newgate, and all the consecutive details usually resulting from the discovery of so heinous a crime. But in the words which suddenly broke upon her ears through this awful vision, she beheld a gleam of hope; and

instantaneously catching at it with the feverish haste of desperation, even though it should prove only a straw, she said, " What mean you? Explain yourself. How can you serve me as a friend? "

" By not becoming your enemy, to be sure," was the immediate response. " As matters now stand, it is in my power to give you into custody on suspicion of having made away with Peter Grumley."

" But you will not do so, Mr. Mobbs? You will not ruin me? " murmured the wretched woman, the words escaping through the chattering of her teeth, and her voice trembling as fearfully as her body.

" Well, ma'am, it would be a pity to send such a handsome creatur' to the scaffold," said the man, coolly.

" O God! do not allude to such a horror," cried Mrs. Brace, in an almost shrieking tone; and, falling upon her knees at his feet, the elegant milliner humbled herself like the veriest mendicant to that ill-looking, vulgar, gross-minded ruffian who was himself an assassin, yes, the assassin of his wife and his children.

" Come, get up, ma'am, get up," he said. " It will be your own fault if I hurt you. I'm sure I don't want to make a disturbance about this business, although it's a wery orkard one."

" Is it possible to hush it up? Can money purchase your silence? " inquired the milliner, with an hysterical rapidity of tone, as she sprang from her knees and joined her hands imploringly.

" Well, I dare say we shall be able to come to an understanding, my dear madam," said Mobbs, whose familiarity, which at any other time would have been odious and disgusting to a degree, was now welcomed as a proof of good feeling. " But before we touch on that part of the business, I must know everything."

" Everything? " repeated Mrs. Brace, now wondering, for the first time, how much he did already know and whence that knowledge was gleaned; and at the same time it struck her that if she had denied the accusation at the very outset and acted with a fortitude proper to the emergency, she would not now be in the power of an unprincipled villain.

" Yes, you must tell me everything," repeated Mobbs,

with a savage emphasis; for he understood all the thoughts that had just traversed her mind. "And you need not fancy that you can baffle me."

"Oh, no, no, I do not entertain such an idea," said the wretched woman, now perceiving that it was too late to assume the air of innocence and the tone of bravado. "I am at your mercy, and you can deal with me as you choose."

"That's talking more sensible," observed Mobbs. "And now, ma'am," he said, abruptly rising from his seat, "you'll be so kind as to show me where you've deposited the dead body of my poor friend."

"Ah! you wish to ruin me, you mean to expose me," cried the miserable Mrs. Brace, an ice-chill striking to her very heart's core. "My God! my God!" she exclaimed, in a frenzied tone, and pressing both her hands to her throbbing brows; "what will become of me?"

"You will ruin and expose yourself if you go on in this manner," said Mobbs, brutally. "Do you want to alarm the whole house? I tell you that I will befriend you if you do as I dictate; but if not —"

"My God! I will not irritate you any more. I will be obedient, passive, docile," murmured the unhappy woman, her teeth chattering with the intense chill of the tremor that was upon her, although the atmosphere of the room was agreeably warm. "What do you require, Mr. Mobbs? Speak, I am at your orders."

"It is now half-past eleven o'clock," said the man, glancing toward the timepiece on the mantel, "and I suppose all your people are pretty well in bed, or soon will be. It won't, therefore, be causing any suspicion if you'll just quietly take a candle in your hand and show me where my poor friend's body is hid. I don't want to know for any reason prejudicial to you, but merely for satisfaction's sake."

"And you will not use the evidence against me? You will not destroy me?" asked Mrs. Brace, still shuddering visibly.

"If I wanted to do you a mischief, I have sufficient grounds on which to act, as matters now stand," replied Mobbs, "and if I had meant it from the very first, I should have arrested you at once. Now do you understand, and will you be satisfied?"

"Yes, yes, I am satisfied," said the miserable woman.

"Then make haste, take the candle, and do as I bid you," returned Mobbs.

"But if any of my servants should be below?" said Mrs. Brace, in nervous alarm.

"Ah! it's below, is it?" muttered Mobbs. "Well," he exclaimed, "go and get your people out of the way, and I'll take a drop more brandy during your absence."

This permission to quit his company and go about as she liked, unwatched and unattended, did more in a single instant to revive Mrs. Brace's courage and inspire her with confidence than all the man's oaths, promises, and protestations of secrecy, silence, and friendship could have done in an hour. A gleam of animation even came back to her countenance and a faint smile appeared upon her lips, so immense was the relief she thus suddenly experienced.

Issuing from the parlour, she descended to the servants' hall, where she found Frederick Dray and Harriet in earnest conversation together, the other domestics having retired to rest.

The handsome footman and the pretty lady's-maid were evidently in a state of much uneasiness and alarm; and they were wondering together what could possibly keep Mr. Mobbs so long with their mistress, when this lady herself entered the servants' hall.

"Oh, madam!" exclaimed Harriet, running toward her, "we are so terribly frightened. What does he want, and is he gone?"

"No, he is not gone," hastily responded Mrs. Brace; "but you have nothing to fear."

"God be thanked!" murmured Harriet, almost fainting with the sudden rebound that her heart gave when thus released from the appalling suspense that had previously held every chord tightened to the extremest tension.

"No, you have nothing to fear," resumed the milliner, in the same quick and excited tone as before; "nevertheless, he knows all — everything."

"Perdition!" ejaculated Frederick Dray.

"O God!" murmured Harriet, now sinking helplessly upon a chair.

"Yes, he knows everything," continued Mrs. Brace; "but he will not betray us, he will accept a bribe, he will

befriend us, and he insists upon my showing him the spot where the body is buried."

"Ah! then he means treachery of some kind, either for now or hereafter," said Frederick Dray; "but I will forestall him," he added, his countenance suddenly expressing a terrible resolution.

"What mean you, my good fellow?" demanded Mrs. Brace, in a whispering tone; but the sinister light which all on a sudden flamed up in her eyes, the ominous contraction of her brow, and the nervous trepidation which shook her entire form showed plainly enough that she already understood Frederick Dray full well.

"You know what I mean, ma'am," he said, his voice becoming low and thick; and, having glanced toward Harriet to assure himself that she did not overhear what was now passing, he fixed his eyes with a bold intelligence upon the countenance of his mistress.

"Yes, I do understand you, Frederick," she murmured. "But, my God! is it necessary — this additional crime?"

"It is necessary," answered Dray. "Bring the villain down into the back kitchen, tell him what tale you will, and as he returns — mind, as he returns, I say — I shall spring upon him from the pantry. But you must hasten back to him, for fear he should suspect a plant, and in the meantime I will get that girl up to her own room," he added, pointing to Harriet, who was sitting, or rather lying back half-fainting in an armchair.

"Be it all as you say, Frederick," observed Mrs. Brace; and she turned hastily away, in order to avoid meeting his looks once more, for it seemed as if there were murder in them.

But during the minute she took to retrace her way to the parlour, Mrs. Brace appeared to obtain a wonderful familiarity with crime, as if by the sudden inspiration of Satan; and ceasing almost instantaneously to look with horror upon another murder, she was led to contemplate it as a necessity, and then to rejoice at the idea as a means of ensuring her safety in future.

In this last-mentioned state of mind was it that she once more stood in the presence of Mobbs, who was just emptying his tumbler as she opened the door.

"Well, is all quiet below?" he demanded, significantly.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Brace. "Two of the domestics were sitting up, but I sent them to their respective chambers. You may come now, Mr. Mobbs, if you please."

"Lead the way, ma'am, and I'll follow," said the ex-constable. "Come, Toby, you ugly blackguard."

These last words were addressed to his dog, which kept close at his master's heels, as the master himself followed Mrs. Brace, who carried a candle in her hand.

Down to the lower regions of the spacious dwelling they descended; and on reaching the bottom of the stairs, Mrs. Brace paused for a moment, under pretext of trimming with a pin the flaring wick of the candle, but really to subdue the sudden feeling of horror which sprang up in her mind as she felt that she was now standing, as it were, upon the threshold of a new crime. For from the short passage leading to the back kitchen did the pantry open on the right hand, and the woman knew that Frederick Dray was concealed there with a murderous intent.

"Be quiet, Toby," exclaimed Mobbs, in a savage tone to the dog, which was beginning to give vent to a low and peculiar growl, in which there was also something plaintive, as if the animal's instinct were already receiving some strange and mysterious attraction toward the spot where murder's dire work was concealed. "Come along, ma'am," said the ex-constable, turning toward Mrs. Brace; "for if you don't act as a guide, this beast will."

The milliner shuddered with a profound sensation of horror; for it seemed to her as if the very instinct of animals were sublimated to the degree of refinement necessary to espy, accuse, and expose the perpetrator of the foul crime of murder.

But, gathering all the remains of that moral energy which had been so terribly shaken within the last hour, Mrs. Brace led the way along the passage; and it was a respite to this miserable woman to reflect that the new crime was not to be perpetrated until she and Mobbs should be retracing their way back from the spot where the murdered victim lay. Thus, even while she had hardened her soul to contemplate the death of her companion as an imperious necessity, she nevertheless experienced an immense relief in the postponement of the fatal instant even for a few minutes.

The passage was threaded; she strained her ears, oh, how

tensely she strained them, to catch a sound, the slightest, that might assure her whether Frederick Dray was in the pantry or not; but all was still in that direction.

She now threw open the door of the back kitchen; but so hideous a sensation of terror once more seized upon her as her eyes fell on the stone that covered the unblessed grave of the corpse, that she staggered on the threshold and leaned against the door-post for support.

"Ah! I understand," muttered Mobbs, in a tone which would have been inaudible under any less momentous circumstances, but which was as easily heard as the roar of a cannon now that every one of the wretched woman's senses was strung to the extremest tension.

"My God! my God!" she murmured, her teeth chattering and her knees knocking together.

"Come, ma'am, don't take on like this," said Mobbs, gradually divesting himself of his wonted brutality of manner in proportion as he found her getting deeper and deeper into his power. "The thing's done and can't be helped now. So we must make the best of it."

What Mr. Mobbs meant by making the best of a murder, we must leave our readers to judge for themselves. Certain, however, it was that the remark carried a sort of philosophical, or rather desperate consolation to the mind of Mrs. Brace, and she said, in a tone of reviving assurance, "You speak truly enough, Heaven knows, Mr. Mobbs. But would to God that it had never happened!" she added, with the most unfeigned, the most heartfelt sincerity.

"There, ma'am, you see it's just as I told you," observed the ex-constable, pointing toward the dog, who was smelling around the very identical stone and giving vent at the same time to a low and hideous sound which can only be described as a subdued moaning howl; "that there animal is as sagacious as a Christian, and I needn't ask where my partner has been buried."

Mrs. Brace was about to remind the ex-constable, for the tenth time, of his promise not to betray her, when she suddenly remembered that the reiteration of the pledge on his part was unnecessary, inasmuch as Frederick Dray was no doubt lying in ambush to silence his lips for ever; and now that she had conquered the first feeling of terror and consternation on revisiting the spot where her victim

lay buried, she derived a sudden and strange hardihood from the thought that a second crime was about to render the first one as safe as it could possibly be made.

But scarcely had this reflection braced her mind with that unnatural courage, scarcely, too, had Mobbs entered the back kitchen and begun to gaze upon the stone beneath which his murdered superior lay, when they were both startled by piercing screams which appeared to come from above and penetrate through the floor and wall and chamber after chamber, down unto that lowest region of the milliner's establishment.

For a few moments Mobbs paused and listened with breathless attention, as if all his thoughts were in an instant diverted from the murder to this new and suddenly transpiring subject of interest; then, as the shrieks continued in louder waves of thrilling, rending, agonizing sound, he yielded to the impulse of his own instincts, and, forgetting that he was no longer a constable nor bound to take notice of any such occurrence, he snatched the candle from Mrs. Brace's hand and darted away like one demented, with the dog at his heels.

So sudden was this movement on his part that the rush which he made along the passage struck a panic to the heart and paralyzed the arm of Frederick Dray, who had been holding himself in readiness to spring forth from the pantry; and the club which he had provided for his murderous purpose fell from his grasp.

As for Mrs. Brace, she stood petrified and stricken dumb for a moment, inasmuch as she suspected only too well whence those rending shrieks emanated, and she was transfixed by the idea of such a ruffian as Mobbs interfering in the matter; but almost at the very next instant the appalling, maddening, horrifying reminiscence shot through her brain that she was now alone in the sepulchre of her murdered victim, and, as the light was rapidly disappearing, she rushed forth from the back kitchen with a shriek of mortal agony.

At the same moment Frederick Dray, having recovered his presence of mind, emerged from the pantry; and the wretched woman, sinking beneath the weight of accumulating misfortunes, threw herself into his arms and fainted. The next instant the light disappeared and total darkness

prevailed in that place; for Mobbs had already gained the top of the staircase leading to the ground floor, and he had taken the candle with him.

The shrieks continued; he paused for a moment to listen, and his quick ear informed him that they came from premises behind those where he now was. A passage leading in that direction met his view, and he rushed along it, shading the light with his hand in order to protect it from the current of air which his rapid progress created. A door barred his way, but it opened to his touch; and, entering another passage, he instantaneously perceived that he had thus forced his way into the house which was at the back of Mrs. Brace's, but the front of which he knew must look upon St. James's Square. The discovery that the two dwellings thus communicated excited his curiosity, thereby forming an additional impulse to urge him on. At the end of this second passage a door opened into a hall lighted by a lamp, and where a footman was seated in a lounging posture, his whole aspect and manner denoting the most supreme indifference to the sounds of anguish which still came with piercing note from above.

"Holloa! who are you, and what the devil do you want?" cried the footman, now starting to his feet as Mobbs rushed into the hall, followed by his dog.

"Don't you hear that row, you cursed sleepy fool?" demanded the ex-constable, savagely; and, without pausing to hear the flunkey's reply, he sprang up the handsomely carpeted and well-lighted staircase, the mongrel keeping close at his heels.

Suddenly the shrieking ceased, but not before the keen and experienced ear of Mobbs had caught the direction whence it came; and, guided by that clue, he unhesitatingly burst open the door facing the head of the staircase.

"Damnation! what means this intrusion?" demanded a fine, tall, portly man dressed in a Turkish costume, and who held in his arms the senseless form of a lovely creature attired in the picturesque garb of a Flower Girl.

"Why, that rape and ravishment and all kinds of things are going on here," said Mobbs; "and it's my dooty to perwent them," he added, still forgetting that he was no longer a peace-officer, but obeying the impulse of those habits which had become second nature.

Then, as he thus spoke, he flung aside the candle which he had brought with him, and, seizing the Prince of Wales with his right hand, he swung him completely around, while with his left arm he tore the senseless Pauline from the royal voluptuary's embrace.

At the same moment the dog, naturally regarding the prince as some enemy of his master's and therefore deeming it right and proper to take a due share in the proceedings, flew at the royal legs and began snapping and barking in a most disrespectful manner at the heels and ankles of the heir apparent to the British throne.

"Call off your cur, you damned rascal!" cried the prince, exasperated almost to madness, as he danced about to avoid the teeth of the annoying mongrel. "Do you hear me, sir? Call off your dog! By the living God — But perhaps you do not know who I am?"

"Some swell-mob scoundrel dressed up in masquerade toggery," said Mobbs, who at that moment was conveying Pauline Clarendon to a sofa, the disturbance having startled her from the deep swoon into which she had fallen.

But springing to her feet, the beauteous maiden threw a rapid glance around; and finding herself freed from the odious embraces of her royal tormentor, she paused not to reflect how she had been delivered nor even to thank her deliverer; but, obedient to the impulse of the terrors consequent on the startling manner in which she had been awakened, she darted from the room.

"Stop her! stop her, I command you!" cried the Prince of Wales, no longer able to control either his words or his actions, and he rushed after the flying damsel.

"At him, Toby!" ejaculated Mobbs; and in a moment the teeth of the dog were fixed in the heir apparent's right leg.

And the heir apparent, oh, crowning ignominy, roared most lustily, while Pauline Clarendon, snatching up her cloak on the landing, bounded along, descended the stairs half a dozen at a time, and, opening the front door, rushed from the house. For the hall was empty, the footman whom Mobbs had encountered there having hastened into the other house to alarm Mrs. Brace with the intelligence that a rough-looking fellow with a mongrel dog had invaded the sanctity of that portion of the establishment which was devoted to "fashionable accommodation."

In the meantime Mobbs had called off his dog; and the Prince of Wales, throwing himself exhausted and bleeding upon a sofa, was about to overwhelm the ex-constable with the astounding revelation of his name and rank, when even through the turmoil of his enraged feelings flashed (like lightning through the stormiest clouds) the conviction that he would only be covering himself with ridicule and enhancing his humiliation to the extremest verge were he to inform that sordid-looking, coarse, and ungainly ruffian who he really was.

" Ah! it's all wery well to lie there kicking up that infernal row," said Mobbs, who, although he had seen the Prince of Wales more than once in his life, did not recognize him in the masquerading garb; " but you've nobody to thank for all this but yourself. What the devil! are the king's lieges to be raped and ravished by such disguised mahogany-jumpers as you, in spite of their cries and screams? I shouldn't be doing my dooty as a Bow Street runner — "

And then Mr. Mobbs suddenly stopped short; for the remembrance flashed to his mind that he was no longer in the service of the peace.

" Ah! you're an officer, are you? " said his Royal Highness, who, despite the bitter annoyance which he felt and the pain which his lacerated leg was causing him, nevertheless perceived the imperious necessity of extricating himself as promptly and also as quietly as he could from the present dilemma. " Well, I dare say you know what it is to let a gentleman escape out of a difficulty by means of a golden key; and as the girl has come to no harm, it would be useless for you to carry the matter any further. There, take those ten guineas and be off. You've done me quite mischief enough already, or rather your dog has," added the prince, with a suppressed moan, as he tied his handkerchief around the wounded limb.

" Well, sir, I'm sure I don't want to make things more uncomfortabler than they are at present," said Mobbs, picking up with ill-concealed satisfaction the gold pieces which his Royal Highness threw down upon a table. " But you must know that if gentlemen like you will get into scrapes, they stand the chance of bringing the law about their ears."

" I paid you to take your departure, and not to remain

here lecturing me," said the prince, with all the dignified hauteur that was natural to him. "But stay, one moment," he cried, a sudden idea striking him; "how came you to burst into this room, or rather, how was it that you were in the house at all?"

"I'd better leave it to this good lady to explain to you, sir," remarked Mobbs, pointing toward Mrs. Brace, who at the moment hurried into the room, followed by Frederick Dray and the other footman.

"Hush!" said the prince, placing his finger upon his lips to warn the milliner not to utter a word which might make known his rank to Mobbs; for he saw by the agitation and dismay which her entire appearance exhibited that it was more than probable she might blurt forth something calculated to betray his incognito.

"I will call again to-morrow night. In the meantime you've nothing to fear, ma'am," hastily whispered the ex-constable as he passed by the milliner; and, calling his dog to follow him, he took his departure, well pleased with the result of the adventure and chinking the gold in his pocket.

"You may retire," said the milliner to Frederick Dray and the other footman. Then, the moment they had left the room, she turned toward the prince, exclaiming, "My God! what has happened? But it was not my fault; you cannot blame me — Oh, I am going mad — mad!"

And flinging herself upon a chair, she pressed her hands to her throbbing brows, as if she could thereby steady her reason which she felt to be rocking upon its throne.

"What in the devil's name is the matter with you?" demanded the prince, who was glad to find a vent for his execrable ill-humour, even though it were against a poor defenceless woman, and that woman the pander to his vile pleasures. "Did that Bow Street runner come to make inquiries concerning the Magsman your husband, or how was it that such an ill-looking ruffian came to be in the house at this time of night?"

"Mr. Harley — your Royal Highness, this is cruel, ungenerous, unkind to a degree," sobbed the wretched milliner. "I — I — do not deserve — such — such — treatment at your hands," and then she burst into a flood of tears.

"Come, Fanny, this is stupid," said the prince, somewhat

mollified by her grief. "I spoke hastily — and unkindly, I will admit; but when one has been interrupted just at the moment of success with a lovely creature, then subjected to the brutal insults of a low ruffian, next bitten in the leg by an accursed dog that may be mad, for anything I know to the contrary — "

"Bitten — by a dog!" screamed Mrs. Brace, starting to her feet and surveying the prince with dismay. "Oh, is this possible?"

"Quite possible, inasmuch as it has happened," said the heir apparent, pointing to the bandage on his leg. "But I will hasten home and get Doctor Somers to look to it at once. Relieve me from suspense, however, before I take my departure, and tell me how that man came to burst into the room; for surely the girl's screams could not have been heard in St. James's Square?"

"No, no," responded the milliner, hastily. "The officer came on a little business of his own — to — to — in fine, to receive some money for the affair of Caroline Walters; and being in the other house, he heard the shrieks — "

"Enough, enough," exclaimed the prince. "I am satisfied now. He did not recognize me, and I gave him ten guineas to go away quietly. But I was fearful that if the girl's screams had been heard outside, a crowd might have collected. Your explanation has, however, put my mind at rest on that head. And now, my dear Fanny, forgive me for what I said just now, and don't think the worse of your old friend on account of a passing petulance on his part. Come, one kiss, and then I will take my departure."

But as the milliner raised her countenance toward the prince, he perceived that it was haggard and had a ghastly look; and fixing his eyes more intently upon her, he saw that the traces of profound horror and bitter grief were upon every lineament, despite her endeavours to assume a composed aspect.

"What, in the name of Heaven, is the matter with you?" inquired the prince, somewhat alarmed, inasmuch as there were so many of his own little affairs mixed up with those of Mrs. Brace that he did not know how far her present cause of annoyance might affect himself. "Tell me, Fanny, what is the matter with you?" he repeated, more emphatically still.

"Nothing, nothing, I can assure you," she answered. "Only the events of the last few days, — Rose Foster's affair, that of Caroline Walters, and now the alarm of this night, all these have unstrung my nerves."

"Well, you must take courage and console yourself," said the prince, not for an instant suspecting that anything more serious than the circumstances she had enumerated was preying upon her mind. "And now good night. I myself am infernally vexed at the issue of the adventure with Pauline Clarendon."

"Pauline Clarendon!" ejaculated Mrs. Brace, forgetting for a moment all the causes of her own affliction in the amazement with which the prince's words had filled her.

"Well, since I inadvertently let the name escape me," he observed, with a smile, "I shall not attempt to conceal the truth. Besides, I may require your assistance in the matter."

"And that was Pauline Clarendon whom you brought hither just now?" remarked the milliner, still under the influence of a profound and somewhat painful surprise. "What, is it possible that the amour with her unfortunate sister did not cause both you and me sufficient alarm — "

"My dear Fanny," interrupted the prince, in a resolute tone, "it is useless to remonstrate. When I came in so hurried a manner to you just now and told you that I had seen the loveliest figure in the whole world at the masquerade, and that Germain was about to bring the unknown hither, I declared that I was already maddened by the elegance, grace, and virgin freshness of that transcendent form. I was then utterly ignorant who the Flower Girl could be; but when she revealed her countenance in this room, oh, then never did Pauline appear so ravishingly beautiful. A thousand charms on no former occasion observed by me were instantaneously discovered, and she struck me as being more lovely than Octavia. Think you, then, that I will abandon the hope of this conquest? Think you that I will renounce my pursuit of her? No, no, a hundred thousand times no. And it was also because she was haughty and reproachful, because she looked daggers at me with her magnificent eyes, and because she darted forth galling arrows in the shape of words from between the parting roses of her lips, ay, it is also on this account that I

will wage war against her stubborn virtue, so that my vengeance and my bliss shall be crowned with triumph at the same moment. Seek not therefore to turn me from my purpose; but, on the contrary, prepare to lend me your aid when I may require it. And now once more good night."

Thus speaking, the prince quitted the room; and muffling himself up in an ample cloak, he returned on foot to Carlton House.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE BOUDOIR OF LOVE AND MYSTERY

We must now return to Lord Montgomery and the Circassian Slave, whom we left at the moment when the latter introduced the former into a chamber the atmosphere of which was warm and perfumed.

Quitting her hold upon the nobleman's hand, his fair companion locked the door, and he heard her take out the key, which she deposited somewhere in the room. She then bade him remove the handkerchief from around his head and throw off his mask and domino; and when he had done this, he found, as of course he had expected, that the chamber was involved in the most pitchy darkness.

That this was the same room of which Lord Florimel had spoken, Montgomery felt convinced the instant that he set foot in it, for the approaches to it were precisely the same as detailed at the close of the forty-second chapter; and he speedily found that not only was it furnished in a most luxurious manner, but that certain articles of furniture were precisely the same as his noble friend had represented. That is to say, the table stood between the sofa and the bed; and near the head of the bed there was a large armchair.

"Seat yourself by my side, dear Eugene," said the lady. in the most tender cadence of her melting and musical voice, taking his hand, at the same time, and thus bringing him close to her upon the sofa. Then throwing her arms about his neck, she drew him toward her and their lips met again in a long, burning kiss.

"Dearest, dearest lady," exclaimed the nobleman, a flood of rapture pouring in unto his soul, "what earthly happiness can compare with this?"

And then, as one arm clasped her supple, yielding, and

luxurious form, he passed his right hand caressingly over her countenance, and he could tell by the touch that her features were beautifully formed, while her cheeks were of velvet softness in one sense and plump and firm in another. Her breath was as fragrant as the zephyr which passes over the sweetest flowers; and he had already observed beneath her mask, when in the theatre, that her teeth were white as pearls and faultlessly even.

"Now, tell me candidly, my dear Eugene," she observed, as her head reposed upon his shoulder, "tell me what you think of the woman who could so far forget herself as to become the heroine of such an adventure as this whereof you yourself are the hero."

"I was about to reply, my charming friend," said Montgomery, "that the intoxication of the happiness which I experience leaves no leisure for reflection, and indeed that I have no wish to think of anything save the ineffable delight which I enjoy in your society. But your question has forced the subject upon my thoughts; and I will candidly declare that I consider you to be wise in following the dictates of your feelings and the impulse of your tenderest passions in strewing the rugged paths of this world with as many flowers as possible. You are formed for love and pleasure. Oh, yes, your nature and your person are alike glowing with raptures, to experience and to impart them. And I love you, I swear by everything sacred that I love you, and perhaps all the more fervently, all the more madly, because of this mystery with which you envelop yourself and which constitutes an additional charm."

"You love me, you love me," murmured the impassioned woman, yielding herself unresistingly to the caresses which the nobleman lavished upon her and courting the voluptuous toyings in which he indulged; "but of what nature is this love, Eugene? Oh, do not deceive me, but confess that it is the mere excitement of the imagination and the passions, an excitement that will leave no durable sentiment behind."

"On the contrary, my dearest unknown," exclaimed Montgomery, speaking with fervour and straining her passionately in his embrace, "I shall never, never forget these moments of love so ineffably delicious and so truly Elysian. Ah! if there were a light in this chamber, you could tell by my eyes, by my whole countenance, that I am

speaking the truth; but even in the midst of this darkness mayst thou obtain a proof of the strength of those emotions which I feel. There, place your hand upon my heart; does it not palpitate with the flutterings of a tenderness which is not altogether sensual? And even now, with the full enjoyment of bliss within my reach, do I prefer reclining with you for a time in this manner, my arm around your waist, your head upon my shoulder, your breath fanning my cheek, your bosom heaving against my chest, and your voice flowing in the sweetest melody upon my ears. Yes, there is sentiment in all this; and where there is sentiment, something more permanent than a mere gross passion hath assuredly an existence. Again, it would be pouring gall into the cup of ambrosia of which I am now drinking such deep draughts were you to tell me that this is the last time as well as the first that I am ever to enjoy so much happiness. I shall know not a greater joy than that of meeting you again; I could know not a greater misery than that of being separated from you for ever. Now, then, adored lady, tell me whether you think I love you?"

"Yes, I believe that you experience an interest in me, Eugene," said the unknown, interrupting herself at every word to bestow upon him the tenderest kisses; "and I at once promise you that we shall meet again."

"Thanks, ten thousand thanks, sweet lady, for this assurance," cried the earl, in unfeigned rapture. "But you will not allow too long an interval to elapse —"

"No," was the soft response; "for I myself shall be only too happy to renew the pleasures of this meeting."

"Then you love me, dear lady, you love me?" exclaimed Montgomery, in a tone evincing the anxiety with which he awaited her answer.

"Yes, I love you, Eugene," said the mysterious unknown; "for I now find that you are as amiable and agreeable as you are grandly handsome. And at some future meeting," she continued, in a still lower and softer tone, as if her entire being were melting under the influence of her emotions, "at some future meeting it may be that I shall throw aside the mask of mystery and tell you who I am."

"Beloved friend," said the nobleman, "I care not who you may be, inasmuch as I adore you for yourself only, and whether you are a duchess or a humble gentlewoman, my

sentiments must ever remain the same. But there does exist a reason wherefore I should rejoice in the dissolution of the mystery which at present surrounds you, and that is because I should then behold with my eyes that countenance which I can only now contemplate with my imagination. On this account shall I hail with an indescribable ecstasy the moment when you may choose to place a full and complete confidence in me."

"And the arrival of that moment depends altogether upon yourself, Eugene," said the lady, one of her fair hands playing caressingly with his countenance.

"Upon myself!" he repeated. "Oh, explain the meaning of your words, my well-beloved, and teach me how I can merit your confidence."

"Listen to me, Eugene, and I will be candid with you," said the lady, in a tone of tender gravity. "The ardour of my temperament induces me to seek the pleasures of love in the manner which brought Lord Florimel to my arms, and which has this night thrown you and me together. I am unmarried, immensely rich, and entirely my own mistress. But you will ask wherefore I have not sought in marriage the legitimate gratification of my passions? In explanation I must inform you that I have ever held in abhorrence the idea of being chained to one individual; and, moreover, knowing the frailty of my nature, I should have shrunk from the bare thought of becoming the wife of an honourable and perhaps kind-hearted and confiding man, to whom it would have been impossible for me to remain constant. Under all these circumstances I preferred the adoption of that luxurious, free, and unshackled existence which was led by the celebrated Manon Lescaut of France, with this difference, however, that whereas she threw neither veil nor gloss over her amours, I have hitherto concealed mine beneath that impenetrable mystery which hides my name, rank, and even personal identity at this very moment from yourself. Well, for some years have I led this life; and yet my lovers have been comparatively few, and those all selected according to the passing whim of a moment. Now, however, I begin to grow weary of that existence, and I experience the necessity of having some one whom I may love and by whom I shall be beloved. I do not think of marriage, no, not a whit more now than I did

when first abandoning myself to this career of what may be termed mysterious voluptuousness. But I long to find a man who is handsome, elegant, and agreeable, and who possesses those honourable and delicate feelings that will render him silent as the tomb in respect to the real position in which he stands toward me. For the world believes me pure and virtuous, my name is untarnished, and my reputation is spotless as the mirror. To preserve this fair fame is naturally my object; and therefore the man who secretly becomes my lover must be one deserving the confidence reposed in him. For my honour — and in that word are also comprised my happiness and my very life — would be in his keeping; and before I can bring my mind to put so immense a trust in any human being, I must receive ample proofs of his worthiness. And here I will observe that so extraordinary are the precautions which I adopt to conceal my frailty from every eye, that not even the domestics who attended the carriage which brought you hither just now suspect for a moment the real purpose of your coming. I shall not reveal to you the tale which I invent on such occasions and which they implicitly believe. Suffice it to say that it is so feasible as to be convincing to them, and not a suspicion exists in their mind as to the purity of their mistress. Thus, my dear Eugene, you perceive that hitherto my amours have been conducted with a security and a safety which leave my reputation untainted; and I shall not lightly nor hastily break down a single one of all the defences and precautions with which I have surrounded my proceedings."

"And if I were to convince you, beloved lady," said Montgomery, who had listened in a strange kind of bewilderment to the singular avowals and explanations which were wafted to his ear in a voice of such melting softness, "if I were to convince you that I am worthy of your confidence, that I possess those feelings of honour and delicacy which you described — "

"In that case, my handsome Eugene," exclaimed the unknown, in a voice that trembled with ecstatic emotions, while her whole frame vibrated beneath the same influence as she lay embraced in his arms, "in that case, my handsome Eugene, you would only have to demand the revelation of my name and rank and to desire that the light of day should

shine upon my countenance in your presence, and you would be gratified. For I may say with truth that I bear a proud name, and without vanity that I am beautiful."

"But of what nature is the proof you require with regard to myself, dear lady?" asked Montgomery, his curiosity excited to an almost intolerable pitch.

"On that head, Eugene, I will give you some explanations," was the reply. "Know, then, that the man who would seek my confidence must begin by giving me his own; and to learn my secrets he must entrust me with all those which he cherishes in his own breast. He must unbosom himself entirely to me, even to the revelation of any little acts or deeds in his life on which he may look back with regret or shame. And if his earlier years have been sullied by any crime, so much the better for the purpose we are now discussing."

"I do not comprehend you, mysterious being that you are," exclaimed Lord Montgomery, a slight shudder passing through his frame.

"Oh, I will soon render myself intelligible, Eugene," she replied, mingling her words with caresses, as if she felt that he trembled and was anxious to reassure him. "For can you not understand that the individual who places himself, as it were, in my power, instantaneously and by virtue of that fact renders himself worthy to become the depositor of my secret? And therefore do I say that if he have committed some crime, it is all the better for such a purpose, inasmuch as if he confide his honour, his liberty, or his life to my keeping, I could not for a moment hesitate to entrust my reputation in his hands. A mutual necessity binds us to secrecy; and we have a reciprocal interest in shielding each other. For if the man whom I thus select as my lover has at any period of his life committed a deed which he would blush to avow or tremble to have made public, — be it swindling, rape, robbery, forgery, or even murder, — I should be all the more ready to trust him, and all the more confident in the safety of my secret. Nor should I love him the less; on the contrary, it would give me pleasure to soothe his wounded spirit, and even his remorse would recommend him the more closely to my affections, because I should rejoice in the fact that he was thus dependent upon me for solace and sympathy. If he were poor, or a spend-

thrift, I should likewise love him with the greater ardour, because I should feel that he was more completely mine, inasmuch as by placing the riches of my purse at his disposal I should ensure his gratitude and touch all the tenderest feelings of his nature. Now, therefore, my dear Eugene, you perceive that I am prepared to accept as a paramour a man whose name must be honourable, though his private life be sullied, a man who, like myself, can look the world in the face, but who dares not take a survey of his own soul. In a word, such a man must first place himself entirely in my power before I will consent to place myself in his; and he who will do this to prove his devotion not only gains my love for evermore, but may likewise enjoy the use of those superfluous thousands which I now bestow upon thankless relatives or equivocal public institutions."

"I have dwelt with an interest the most profound, dear lady, upon every word which has fallen from your lips," said the nobleman, bewildered by her language and intoxicated by the fond ardour of her caresses, "and I now comprehend you fully. But suppose that I was to tell you, while becoming a candidate for your permanent love, that I have never committed a deed the revelation of which would place me in your power, and that I am therefore unable to give you the guarantees which you require."

"Were you to tell me this much, Eugene," replied the lady, in a tone of prompt decision, "I should not believe you, and indeed you would at once destroy all the confidence which I might be previously disposed to place in you. Because there breathes not a man who has devoted himself to pleasure and who is known to be extravagant and even profligate, there breathes not such a man who can hold his head erect and proclaim himself sinless. No, it is impossible. And, moreover, were you to dare breathe such an assertion in my ears, it would take the aspect of an insult; forasmuch as it would be contrasting your own vaunted virtue with my frailty and shame."

"Dearest lady, I do not pretend to be immaculate," said the earl, lowering his voice to a whisper; "nay, more, I will even confess —"

"Ah! now you inspire me with an increasing confidence, Eugene, my handsome Eugene," exclaimed the impassioned unknown; and, fastening her lips to his mouth, she bestowed

upon him so long, luxurious, and burning a kiss that his form quivered with a perfect frenzy of ecstatic sensations, and he experienced all the delicious ebriety of the soul's thrilling raptures. "Yes, now I begin to adore you, my Eugene," continued the Circassian Slave, her bosom heaving and falling with voluptuous tumult against his chest; "and I will make you the god of my worship, the idol of my devotion, if you have only the courage to gain my confidence. Oh, I already feel that we are destined to arrive at a full and complete understanding with each other; and I now rejoice at the deception which you practised in order to take the place of your friend Florimel. For you, my Eugene, can appreciate the love and tenderness which I am prepared to bestow upon you, and which will place all I possess at your disposal. Yes, there is no sacrifice that I will not make for you, Eugene, in order to prove the strength, the ardour, the permanence of my attachment; and in return you will ever be as kind and amiable as you are now."

"Oh, every word you utter constitutes an irresistible temptation, siren that thou art," murmured the nobleman, now intoxicated with passion and maddened with desire to a degree which rendered him reckless of everything in the whole world save the charming object of his present enthusiasm. "Never did I become so completely a prey to the witching influence of woman as I now am; never was I so utterly enthralled by the magic of her voice, the tender persuasiveness of her tongue, and the ardour of her caresses. Oh, to behold your countenance, to look into the depth of those eyes which must be so beautiful, to gaze upon the expressive softness of those features which are faultless even to the touch as I pass my hand over them, to behold the flush of love and pleasure upon your cheeks, and to see that bosom's heaving which I now feel, oh, what sacrifice would I not make, what price would I not pay! Yes, even if it were placing my more than honour, my very existence, in your power, I should not hesitate."

"Then you do love me, Eugene, you love me, although you have not seen my face?" exclaimed the Circassian Slave, throwing fresh fervour, if possible, into her caresses and a more thrilling tenderness into her voice. "But I have already told you that I am beautiful, and it will be a proud moment for me when I can reveal my countenance to your

eyes. Oh, then, I shall not fear the result of the impression which will be made upon you; on the contrary, I have vanity enough to believe that you will bless the day that gave such a mistress to your arms. Moreover, — and you will excuse me for again touching upon such a subject at such a moment, — I know that your resources have been well-nigh absorbed by your love of pleasure and a ruinous lawsuit; and it will be my joy and delight to bring back smiles to your lips by placing some fifteen or twenty thousand pounds in your hands. Yes, I have that sum at my disposal at the present time; and it is yours, Eugene, yours, as a small token of my love, as a proof of my confidence, as an earnest of that compact of affection and of a secret understanding which must henceforth bind us to each other. And think not, my handsome Eugene, that I shall prove a jealous mistress, or that any ridiculous whims or despotic exactions on my part will instil the least drop of gall into the cup of pleasure which we are to quaff with each other. No, my whole study shall be to ensure your happiness; and if you choose to make some deserving woman the partner of your rank and fortune, I shall not regard her as a rival. Because I shall rest assured that you will still find a few occasional leisure moments to devote to one who has already conceived a sudden but not the less powerful affection for you, and who is disposed to make every sacrifice to ensure your felicity and retain your friendship until death."

There was something indescribably winning in the caresses that accompanied this persuasive appeal, which went searchingly to the innermost depths of the nobleman's heart; and there was likewise something so mysteriously romantic and yet so full of truth and sincerity in the language and the manner in which the impassioned woman offered her love and her riches for the acceptance of that man whose ardent temperament made him rejoice at the possession of the former and whose almost beggared purse caused him to snatch greedily at the latter, there was something so strange, so full of a magic charm, so profoundly touching in all this, that the strongest mind would have yielded and the most suspicious nature would have given way. The reader will not therefore be surprised if Lord Montgomery surrendered himself, soul and body, to the ineffable witchery of that

mysterious influence; and, anxious to behold the realization of all that the enamoured lady had shadowed forth in language alike so tender and so glowing, he folded her in an embrace full of enthusiastic feeling, exclaiming, " Oh, my adored unknown, let me at once prove myself worthy of your confidence. Let the delicious compact be sealed between us without another moment's delay."

" Tell me, then, my handsome Eugene, all that concerns you," said the Circassian Slave, overwhelming him with the tenderest kisses and the most voluptuous toyings. " Tell me the history of your life, unbosom every secret which your soul cherishes. Retrace your whole career, tremble not to expose its faults, shrink not from unveiling its deeper stains, if such there be. But act frankly and candidly toward me, make me your confidant and your friend, and all mystery shall then at once cease on my part."

" Yes, I will place myself in your power, dearest lady, irresistible charmer," said the earl, in a stifling tone. " Oh, if you were Satan in disguise, luring me to destruction, I could not combat against the influence which you have acquired over me. My God! how I long to know who you are, woman of wondrous witchery and romantic mysteriousness that thou still art to me! But since it now depends upon myself to dissolve that spell which renders you thus unknown and your countenance invisible, I will not delay the talismanic conjuration which is to lighten this strange darkness. Give me thine ear, then, my well-beloved, and prepare to listen to things, some of which will excite thy liveliest interest, and others make the blood curdle in thy veins."

" Oh, tell me all that, my adored Eugene, my worshipped lover," murmured the lady, pressing his hand passionately against her glowing bosom. " And think not that you will alarm or annoy me by any possible revelation which you can make; for I warn you that unless the promised confidence be so complete and in itself contain such facts as will place you thoroughly in my power, I shall not dare incur the risk of making myself known to you."

" God knows, thou siren," exclaimed Lord Montgomery, a rapid shudder passing over him, a shudder which she felt as she reclined in his arms, and which made her press even

more closely still to his breast, " God knows, thou siren, that I am about to place myself in thy power."

And then, as if to escape from the thoughts which had for an instant disturbed him with so harrowing an effect, and fall back again into that ecstasy of feeling which bathed his whole soul in a fount of voluptuousness, he imprinted innumerable kisses on the smooth brow, the glowing cheeks, and the moist, plump mouth of his companion; and then, yielding to the torrent of emotions which, alike delirious and delicious in their intoxicating influence, bore him on as if in an irresistible whirl of pleasure, he began to breathe his promised confessions in the ear of the lady.

And then, in the deep Stygian darkness of that chamber, but in an atmosphere warm and perfumed, with a splendid creature reclining in his arms, her whole form respiring soft and sensuous love, in this manner did the nobleman, no longer master of himself, but hurried on by a witching influence which he could not control, rendered insensate to and indifferent to all consequences save those which the siren herself had shadowed forth, abandoning himself therefore to the spell which was upon him, and full of a fervent hope and a blind confidence, in this manner was it, we say, that Lord Montgomery began to pour forth his revelations into the ears of the woman who had acquired so marvellous an ascendency over him.

And she listened to the tale in the deepest silence, remaining almost motionless, too, in his arms the whole time, as if wrapped up in a breathless attention, save that now and then she pressed his hand with all the apparent ardour of the enthusiasm she had previously testified toward him; but when he paused, after having spoken for nearly a quarter of an hour in a low and murmuring though perfectly audible voice, she threw her arms around his neck, kissed him passionately, and exclaimed, in a voice full of joyous excitement, " Oh, I thank thee for this confidence, my ever dear, dear Eugene! "

" And you are not ashamed of the man who is henceforth to be thy lover, thy paramour, thy friend? " said the earl, his whole frame trembling with the ecstatic feelings which her ardour caused him to experience.

" Ashamed of you! " she repeated. " Oh, no, no, that were impossible. On the contrary, I adore you, I worship

you, my handsome Eugene. For now I perceive that all the licentiousness, all the voluptuous profligacy of my own career, render me a fitting companion for thee. Ashamed of you! Ah! should I not be also ashamed of myself, if I experienced such a feeling with regard to thee?"

"And yet you have heard all the cruelties I have practised toward the unhappy girls whom I have seduced at different times," said the nobleman; "how I have deserted them, suffered them to pine away in neglect, or perish in poverty."

"Every man of pleasure has done the same," observed the lady.

"Then, too," he continued, "you have heard all the meannesses which I have practised at different times to raise money, ay, and the crimes too that I have committed, such as fraud upon my bankers, forgery with my discounters, and all the routine of those acts which men so frequently practise when driven to desperation by their pecuniary necessities."

"Yes; but you have passed through the ordeal without detection," said the Circassian Slave; "and in the presence of the world your name is as untarnished and your reputation as unsullied as ever it was. Oh, all that you have told me yet amounts to comparatively nothing when we thus examine it in detail; and I still feel that my lascivious life stamps me with greater infamy than that which, so far as I am yet aware, could possibly attach itself to you. Proceed, therefore, my generous Eugene, my noble-hearted lover, and do not let me have to blush in your presence when I reveal my countenance. No, it is for you to prove yourself worse than I, and then away with the mystery that now surrounds me."

"Well, I will proceed, my angel; I will tell you more —"

"Not more, but all!" interrupted the lady, with passionate vehemence. "Come, delay not, time is passing."

"Oh, your anxiety to reach the end of this phase in our connection is not greater than mine, dearest unknown," exclaimed the earl. "I will therefore at once resume my confession by touching upon that lawsuit in which I am engaged against the Marchioness of Bellenden. Do you know that lady?"

"I have seen her, but we are not acquainted," was the

response; and the Circassian Slave pressed the nobleman's hand, as if to encourage him to proceed.

And he did proceed; and, in thus continuing his narrative, he spoke in a lower, deeper, and more solemn tone, as if his words were now things, and his language was conveying matters of the gravest import. And again, in utter silence and with a respiration almost entirely suspended, did the lady listen to the revealings which grew more astounding, more awe-inspiring as they progressed; until at last the nobleman breathed one fact, gave utterance to one circumstance which made her whole frame vibrate with a sudden tremor as she lay reclining in his arms. 'Twas as if a galvanic shock had been imparted all in a moment and unexpectedly; and the earl stopped short beneath the influence of a consternation which fell upon him with a similar abruptness.

"Ah! now you loathe, you abhor, you detest me," he exclaimed, in a wild tone; "and I have said too much."

"No, no, dearest Eugene, not a syllable too much," hastily cried the Circassian Slave, starting up and for the tenth time throwing her arms about his neck and folding him in a fervid embrace. "I rejoice, oh, I rejoice that you have done that deed, at least for one reason: because now I can look you without shame in the face, and, moreover, you have indeed placed yourself in my power. But such a noble confidence shall never, never be betrayed by me. On the contrary, I will cherish your secret as religiously as if it were mine own. And now you must give me all the details of that event, my Eugene, for it is invested with a thrilling and exciting interest."

And the insensate nobleman, once again abandoning himself to that ecstasy of feeling in which the wiles, the witchery, and the fascination of this extraordinary woman appeared to be able to plunge him at will, continued to breathe in her ear the explanatory details which she sought, and to the narration of which she encouraged him by the tenderest caresses.

At length he ceased speaking, and every incident of his life was now made known to her.

"You have told me all, Eugene, you have told me all," she murmured, as, seated upon his knees, with her arms around his neck, she lavished upon him such kisses that the

very air of that dark chamber seemed filled with their fervour. "You have told me all, and I thank you, oh, I thank you, from the bottom of my soul. But now let us seek the couch of love, and when the morning dawns, the sunbeams shall shine upon my countenance. Then will I reveal to you my name, and all the first conditions of our compact will be fulfilled."

"Be it as you say, adorable woman," exclaimed the earl, maddened with desire; and he covered her face with devouring kisses.

"Stay, we must seal our compact with wine as well as with love," said the lady, as if inspired with the sudden thought of enhancing the thrill of sensual longing by the influence of the generous grape; and reaching toward the table, but without quitting her position upon his knees, she felt with her fair hands for what she sought.

In a few moments the sharp sound of an exploding cork, followed by the hissing of effervescent wine, and by the exhalation of a delicious aroma, made Lord Montgomery aware that it was in champagne the compact was to be ratified; and immediately afterward he felt a glass raised to his lips.

"I pledge thee, my Eugene," said the lady, "in the generous juice of Epernay, and long may the bond of our affection endure."

"I pledge thee in return, my adorable unknown," exclaimed Montgomery, "and may death alone be enabled to quench the flame of that passion which we now cherish for each other."

Having thus spoken, he drained the glass; but as he withdrew it from his lips, it fell from his hands, and a mortal terror suddenly seized upon him as he experienced a sensation of giddiness fasten on his brain, as it were, all in an instant. A cry of alarm escaped him, and the lady sprang from her seat upon his knees, her musical tones now sounding in a laugh of triumph. He endeavoured to raise himself from the sofa; but his limbs were heavy as lead, insensibility gained upon him, all his ideas fell suddenly into confusion, he heard nothing more, he felt nothing more, and the scene of mystery and love and romance terminated all in a moment in an utter blank.

When Lord Montgomery awoke again to consciousness, the light was streaming in upon him from the window facing the couch in which he was lying. He rubbed his eyes and looked around. Where was he? Why, assuredly in his own chamber in Grafton Street, in his own bed!

Then was it all a dream? Were all those circumstances which now came slowly back to his memory mere incidents of a fantastic vision, and had he been the prey of a delusion in which the Circassian Slave was a heroine supplied by his own overheated imagination?

Yes, it must be so. And yet, as he raised himself up in his bed and looked all about the apartment, with the bewilderment of one who knows not yet whether he be really awake or still dreaming, his eyes caught the sight of the blue domino upon the chair by the side of the couch.

Unable to endure the agonizing suspense which now seized upon him, he rang the bell violently.

The summons was almost immediately answered by his valet.

"Gilbert, what time was it when I came home last night?" demanded the nobleman, assuming a tone of indifference; for he did not choose his dependent to observe the excitement of feeling under which he was labouring.

"It was about two o'clock this morning, my lord," was the response.

"Ah!" was the earl's involuntary ejaculation; for the conviction struck him, with the withering effect of lightning, that the adventures of the past night were indeed no dream. "Well, was I in rather a curious state, or how was it?" he demanded, impatiently.

"Since your lordship asks the question," said Gilbert, "I am bound to reply. The truth, then, is that your lordship was so exceedingly overcome by liquor as to be entirely insensible."

"And who was kind enough to bring me home?" inquired the nobleman, his heart sinking lower and lower every instant.

"Your lordship arrived in a carriage."

"Whose carriage?" was the demand, uttered with almost savage impatience.

"I do not know, my lord," returned Gilbert. "It was a plain one of dark colour."

"Ah!" again ejaculated Montgomery, remembering a certain point in Florimel's narrative where the barouche was similarly described. "But go on. Who came with me?"

"A footman had charge of your lordship."

"A tall man, a very tall man?" exclaimed the earl, the fever of his impatience amounting almost to a frenzy.

"I believe he was, my lord," responded the valet; "but really I took little notice of him, unless it was to observe that he studiously averted his countenance from the light of the street-lamp, as he helped to lift your lordship out of the carriage."

"But did he say nothing?" demanded Montgomery.

"Merely that your lordship had indulged somewhat too freely where you had passed the evening," replied the valet. "The carriage immediately drove away, and I put your lordship to bed."

"You may retire," said the nobleman.

Gilbert accordingly withdrew; and the instant the door closed behind him, the unhappy earl gave vent to his tortured feelings in a moan of indescribable anguish, and, burying his head in the pillows, he yielded to all the excruciating agonies of his terrible reflections.

For he now remembered that he had placed not only his honour, but his very life, in the hands of a woman totally unknown to him; and the termination of his interview with her was by no means of a reassuring nature. Indeed, it was impossible to blind himself to the damning fact that with the most exquisite skill and a marvellous refinement of astuteness, she had succeeded in wheedling him out of secrets which might be used against him with an effect that he shuddered to contemplate.

Recoiling in horror from this stage of his agonizing reflections, he cursed, oh, how bitterly, bitterly, he cursed his folly, his worse than folly, his madness, raving, stark, staring, incomprehensible madness, in divulging such tremendous secrets to an utter stranger. But the evil was done; it was irrevocable, as are all deeds which belong to the past, and, like too many of those incidents in the life of man, it left behind bitter food for reflection.

CHAPTER XLV

THE PIOUS TRAVELLERS

THE morning which followed the night of the masquerade, and all the incidents resulting therefrom, was clear, bright, and beautiful.

At about half-past nine o'clock on this said agreeable morning, two individuals might have been observed riding quietly along the road running through Blackheath. One was mounted upon an animal which its proprietor, no doubt, called a horse; but it was the most wretched specimen of skin and bones that was ever compelled to perform active service instead of being immolated at a knacker's yard for the benefit of sausage-makers and purveyors of cats' meat. The other individual was seated upon the back, or rather, the hind-quarters of one of those useful quâdrupeds called donkeys; and instead of keeping by the side of his companion, he rode respectfully behind him.

But who are these travellers, that must even at the first glance remind our readers so strongly of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza? Who are these wayfarers, mounted upon beasts that certainly might have a more comely appearance?

The one sitting so demurely on the back of the wretched Rozinante is none other than our dearly beloved friend, the Reverend Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby, and the humble individual bestriding the noble ass is his faithful follower, Mr. Ichabod Paxwax.

And if they were any other than two such highly respectable and soul-saving " vessels " we should be disposed to laugh heartily at the ridiculous figure which they both cut on the present occasion; but being the leaders of the New Lights, we must contemplate their progress with awe and

record their adventures with as much gravity as we can command for the purpose. At the same time, we are bound to admit that there was considerable extenuation on behalf of the small boys who roared and yelled and hooted as the reverend travellers passed by the spots where they were playing; for Mr. Sneaksby had evidently put on his most pathetic air of sanctimonious misery, and had screwed up his countenance to the extremest pitch of pious wretchedness, while Mr. Paxwax looked uncommonly like a man who, having been awfully drunk overnight, labours under the effect of an excruciating headache next morning, and wears an aspect as doleful as if he were just going to be hanged.

Slowly did the Reverend Nathaniel Sneaksby and Ichabod Paxwax journey along, the horse on which the former was mounted maintaining a shuffling, shambling pace, as if it were as pious as its rider and had a violent inclination to fall upon its knees, and the donkey jogging onward in a sullen, obstinate, dogged manner, as if he had made up his mind that no earthly power should be able to impel him into an accelerated speed.

"Five miles have we ridden, Brother Paxwax," said Mr. Sneaksby, at length breaking a long silence and glancing at a mile-stone as he spoke, "and verily it hath taken us two hours to achieve this much of our journey."

"Two mortal hours, Brother Sneaksby," answered Ichabod; "and, behold, my nether parts are already sorely inflamed by the unpleasant motion of this obstinate beast."

"Of a surety, when I behold the trouble which thine animal causeth thee, Brother Paxwax," said Mr. Sneaksby, "I no longer marvel that Balaam should have been angered by his ass."

"And if Balaam had possessed a horse, he assuredly would not have ridden the ass," rejoined Mr. Ichabod Paxwax, somewhat savagely.

"My dear brother, thou art impatient," said the Reverend Mr. Sneaksby, in a tone of gentle remonstrance.

"Why, when one is pretty well raw exactly where it is most inconvenient to be so," observed Ichabod, with continued acrimony in his tone, "it is enough to make him somewhat ruffled in his temper."

"Thou art deficient in grace, Brother Paxwax," said his leader, reproachfully.

"Verily, and it is rather a supply of grease which I need at this moment, Brother Sneaksby," retorted Ichabod.

"Dost thou turn my words to ridicule?" exclaimed the reverend gentleman, now speaking sharply himself. "Truly, and this is most disrespectful on thy part, Brother Paxwax. It is likewise unjust and unkind, seeing that I am in no way an accessory to the galling which thou receivest in the breech from the uncouth trotting of that animal. For when it was resolved by the elders last evening that a deputation should repair to Dartford, and when you and I were requested to undertake that grave and solemn duty, thou didst of thine own accord declare thine intention of riding upon an ass, as a proof of thy meekness and a sign of thy humility."

"Since we are alone together, Brother Sneaksby," observed Mr. Ichabod Paxwax, who was writhing miserably upon the saddle, and making the most awful contortions with his full-moon countenance, "I will honestly and frankly confess that I chose this asinine mode of conveyance inasmuch as I am unaccustomed to bestride the nobler animal called a horse."

"And therefore you perceive, Brother Paxwax, that thy duplicity is deservedly punished," said Mr. Sneaksby. "Thou didst arrogate to thyself meekness and humility in selecting the ass, and the hidden reason was thine incapacity to ride the horse. Dost thou know, Brother Paxwax, what the ungodly would call thee?"

"What?" demanded Ichabod.

"A humbug," replied his reverend leader.

"Then if the ungodly did," exclaimed Mr. Paxwax, "I would pull off my coat, tuck up my shirt-sleeves, and punch the ungodly's head."

"Oh, thou man of wrath!" ejaculated Mr. Sneaksby, dropping the reins and holding up his hands in sanctimonious horror at the warlike threat.

But as the travellers were at this moment descending a hill, and the horse more than ever required to have his head held up, on account of his kneeling propensities, the result of Mr. Sneaksby's sudden abandonmentof the reins was that the beast stumbled over a stone, and the reverend leader of the New Lights was pitched airily and neatly over the animal's head.

"Murder!" roared the reverend gentleman, as he rolled over and over upon the dusty road.

"Fire!" ejaculated Mr. Ichabod Paxwax, not knowing, in the bewilderment of the moment, what was the precise nature of the alarm which he ought to raise.

"Of a verity this is marvellously unpleasant," groaned forth Mr. Sneaksby, slowly and painfully rising from the ground and rubbing himself all over. "I am sorely bruised, but I thank God that no bones are broken But now I cannot remount this graceless beast without assistance, and, in all Christian charity, Brother Paxwax, art thou bound to give me a leg up."

"Be it as thou sayest," exclaimed Mr. Paxwax, descending with a sort of gingerly precaution from his donkey; for the poor man was indeed enduring excruciating pain from the cause already hinted at.

Having just rubbed off the dust from his reverend leader's garments by means of his pocket-handkerchief, Mr. Paxwax endeavoured to hoist that reverend gentleman upon the horse; but just at the moment when the said reverend gentleman was about to throw his leg over, the animal started suddenly aside, and the result was that Mr. Sneaksby fell heavily a second time, bearing down Mr. Paxwax with him.

Up they both got in woful plight; and it really may be pardoned them if they both gave vent to those little ejaculatory expressions of irritation which are vulgarly called oaths. Indeed, we are bound, as honest historians, to admit that the Reverend Nathaniel Sneaksby damned the horse's eyes, while Mr. Ichabod Paxwax proclaimed an ardent desire to cut his cursed liver out. Their very venial impatience being thus expended in imprecations, they regarded each other with looks of shame and confusion.

"Brother Paxwax, didst thou hear the words that fell from my lips?" said Mr. Sneaksby, in a humiliated and contrite tone.

"No, that I didn't," exclaimed Ichabod. "Neither did you hear what I said, Brother Sneaksby."

"Verily and my ears were closed," was the response.

Mutually cheered by these assurances, they brushed the dust off each other's garments, and having performed this "Christian office," as they termed it, they made another

attempt in respect to the "leg up." But this time Mr. Paxwax hoisted his reverend and venerated friend so suddenly up that the said reverend and venerated friend pitched completely over the animal, and rolled in the dust on the other side.

"Damnation seize you for a clumsy fool!" roared Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby, now irritated beyond all power of endurance; and starting up from the ground, he rushed after Mr. Ichabod Paxwax with the evident intention of inflicting personal chastisement upon him.

But Ichabod, despite of the menace which he had just now uttered relative to punching the head of the ungodly, was at the bottom an arrant coward; and darting away, he led Mr. Sneaksby a race, now running around the horse and the ass, then dodging in between them, until his reverend pursuer was quite exhausted.

"Brother Paxwax," said this gentleman, panting for breath, "let there be no strife between us, but give me the hand of peace."

"Cheerfully will I respond unto thy Christian proposal, Brother Sneaksby," exclaimed Ichabod; and he advanced in full confidence and with extended hand toward his leader.

"There, take that for your pains," ejaculated Mr. Sneaksby, dealing Mr. Paxwax a tremendous blow on the left eye the moment he got him within arm's reach.

This treacherous proceeding astounded Brother Ichabod even more completely than the assault staggered him; and, clapping his hand to the damaged optic, he gazed with the other in a sort of stupid consternation upon his bellicose leader.

"Now who is the man of wrath?" he at length exclaimed, but prudently stepping back a pace or two, in order to avoid a repetition of the punishment.

"I love thee, Brother Paxwax," said Mr. Sneaksby, whose anger was now appeased by the vent it had found. "Yea, verily, I love thee, and therefore do I chasten thee."

"Deuce take such love!" growled Mr. Paxwax. "It has cost me no small measure of pain, besides the unpleasantness of appearing before the Reverend Joel Brugg with an eye bunged up."

"You shall bathe it in the limpid waters at the next spring we come to, Ichabod," said Mr. Sneaksby, now

adopting a conciliatory tone, for, in truth, he was heartily ashamed of his intemperance.

"I would rather have a drop of strong water at the next public-house," quoth Mr. Paxwax.

"That likewise shalt thou have, Ichabod," rejoined the reverend gentleman.

Soothed by this promise, Mr. Paxwax once more assisted his loving friend to a leg up; and this time the leader of the New Lights was safely hoisted into his saddle. Ichabod then remounted his ass; but when the horse was put in motion, the donkey positively and sternly refused to budge an inch. There stood the stubborn animal just like a statue, gazing upon vacancy, and apparently nailed to the ground. Vainly did Mr. Paxwax coax him with sundry pattings on the neck, fruitlessly did he try the usual talismanic influence of "Gee up!" Not an inch would the beast move; but there he stood planted in the middle of the road, with the influential member of the New Lights upon his back looking quite as much like an ass as himself.

In fact, the appearance of the man and his donkey was almost as ridiculous as that of the equestrian statue of the Duke of Wellington perched on the arch at the corner of the Green Park; and therefore the reader may judge how very stolid indeed Mr. Ichabod Paxwax and his stubborn ass must have looked.

Fortunately for the hero of this dilemma, a stage-coach happened to pass at the time; and the coachman, instantaneously comprehending the position of affairs, bestowed such a cut with his whip upon the donkey that all his obstinacy evaporated in a moment, and, kicking up his heels to the great discomfiture of Ichabod's equilibrium and the great aggravation of his physical sufferings, the beast started off into a sharp canter.

The whistling sound of the whip through the air was not lost upon the Reverend Mr. Sneaksby's Rozinante, which actually and positively broke into a gallop that must have even astonished itself, and would have certainly struck its owner with surprise had he been present, seeing that the animal had not performed such a feat for the last ten years.

In this manner did the cavalcade proceed for a short distance, when the appearance of a public-house became the signal for a halt. There the two pious travellers got their

clothes properly brushed; and Mr. Paxwax bathed his eye, which was indeed pretty nearly bunged up, as he himself had predicted. However, all his animosity vanished when he found that while he had been busy in abluting his optic, Mr. Sneaksby had ordered devilled kidneys and a quart of egg-flip, for both of which species of creature comforts Mr. Paxwax entertained a considerable liking.

The refreshments were relished with a zest all the more keen inasmuch as the chosen vessels of the New Lights had breakfasted at the early hour of seven, in order to commence their journey at half-past; and having disposed of the kidneys and the flip and read the landlord a homily upon brotherly love and the blessings of abstinence, they mounted their beasts and resumed their way.

The church clock at Dartford was proclaiming the hour of noon when the Reverend Mr. Nathaniel Sneaksby and Mr. Ichabod Paxwax made their entry into that town.

"Hooray! brayvo!" yelled forth a parcel of boys who were playing at marbles in the middle of the street; and, hastily gathering up their "alley taws" and their "commoneys," they began dancing and capering and hooting and bawling on either side of the sanctimonious travellers.

"Beware, boys, beware!" exclaimed Mr. Sneaksby, assuming a look of awful solemnity. "Remember how the wicked youths were served who insulted Elisha. Are ye not afraid that bears will come forth from yon woods in the distance and eat ye up?"

"There b'ain't no beers in these here parts," cried the ringleader of the juvenile mob; and as he "took a sight" at the reverend gentleman at the same time, his mischievous companions all became convulsed with laughter.

"Gee up!" vociferated another boy; and picking up a stick, he inflicted divers hard thwacks upon Mr. Sneaksby's horse.

"Now then, old stubbornness!" cried a third urchin, addressing himself to the donkey; and while Mr. Paxwax was remonstrating with him upon the impropriety and ungodliness of his conduct, another boy quietly and cleverly attached a bramble to the animal's tail.

Thereupon the ass began to exhibit divers symptoms of uneasiness, to the infinite disgust and annoyance of Mr. Paxwax, who was scarcely able to retain his seat.

"Avaunt, incarnate imps of Satan!" he thundered forth, as his hands grasped the mane of the donkey; for the beast was kicking at one moment, running forward at another, then stopping short, then backing on the pavement in a manner most threatening to the shop-windows, and then galloping on again at a rate which almost jolted its unhappy rider to pieces.

And all this time the mischievous boys were keeping up with the cavalcade, yelling, hooting, tossing up their caps in the air, and playing off the artillery of their jokes and gibes against the miserable victims of this juvenile persecution. The tradesmen came forth from their shops, windows were thrown open and crowded with faces, the passengers in the streets stopped to behold the amusing scene, and the "oldest inhabitant in the place" did not remember so extraordinary an excitement having ever before disturbed the tranquillity of Dartford.

At length some individual took compassion on Mr. Paxwax and removed the bramble from the donkey's tail; and this same "good Samaritan," as Mr. Sneaksby denominated him, gave the necessary information to guide the pious travellers to the dwelling of the Reverend Joel Brugg. Accordingly, in a few minutes they reached a public-house which stood within a few yards of their destination; and having put up their cattle at that place of "accommodation for man and beast," they hastened to knock at Mr. Brugg's door, the persevering small boys forming a line along the edge of the pavement and indulging in sundry ironical cheers and jocular obesrvations.

We must here pause for a few moments to state that the Reverend Joel Brugg was the founder and pastor of a certain sect bearing the name of Candelabrians, and who were tolerably numerous in Dartford and the adjacent districts. The house in which Mr. Brugg dwelt with the wife of his bosom and the numerous family upon whose countenance he had stamped his image, and a very curious one it was, too, alike in the original and in its eleven miniature reflections, his house, we say, was a neat yellow brick building, containing eight rooms, and having a piece of garden-ground at the back, the whole having been purchased by the money of the Candelabrians for the express behoof of their revered pastor and the numerous tribe of Bruggs.

The Reverend Joel himself was a tall, thin, bony man, not unlike Mr. Sneaksby in figure, but having a face of very tallowy complexion and thin black hair, combed in a sleek manner over his forehead. He had large greenish eyes, bearing an amazing resemblance to boiled gooseberries; and his demeanour was as solemnly sanctimonious, his gait as demurely prim, his speech as deliberately measured, and his tone as awfully sepulchral as the most fastidious "saint" could possibly desire. His wife was as like him as if she had been his sister instead of his spouse: tall, thin, and hatchet-faced, she looked both the prude and the vixen, although Mr. Brugg was wont to represent her as "the very best woman in existence."

At the moment when Mr. Sneaksby and Mr. Paxwax knocked at the door, Mr. and Mrs. Brugg were in the middle of a pretty little domestic dispute relative to the dinner, or rather, what it was to consist of; for a pious Candelabrian had sent the pastor a sucking-pig in the morning, and the said pastor was desirous of having it cooked for that day's enjoyment, whereas Mrs. Brugg was equally anxious that the cold remains of a leg of mutton should be previously disposed of. The dispute was waxing so warm that the Reverend Joel Brugg was on the point of coming to blows with "the very best woman in existence," when the loud double knock fell upon their ears with startling effect; and the next moment they were frightened almost out of their wits by the yells, hootings, and hurrahings of the small boys forming the New Lights' escort.

A miserable, half-starved, dirty servant of all work, whose age was about seventeen, and who had a hungry eye and a famished look altogether, was hastily despatched to open the door, and the visitors were immediately conducted into the front parlour. The mob of juveniles then gave "one cheer more," and dispersed to resume their game with alley taws and commoneys.

Mr. and Mrs. Brugg were in the kitchen when the New Lights arrived at their house; and on the wretched servant delivering the names of those worthies, the pastor hastily observed to his wife, "Well, upon my word, my love, I think you were right after all, and we will keep the pig till to-morrow. For these chaps are certain to stay to dinner: indeed, we cannot possibly avoid asking them."

"Then, mind we're water drinkers, Mr. Brugg," returned his better half, with a most emphatic significancy; "for I am not going to waste our money in buying spirits for them fellers, I can tell you."

"Certainly not, my dear, certainly not," exclaimed Joel, approvingly. "We're water drinkers to the backbone — for this day, at least."

Having exchanged these hasty observations, and arrived at so pleasant an understanding with each other, Mr. and Mrs. Brugg proceeded with solemn demeanour to the parlour.

"Welcome, good Brother Sneaksby; welcome, Brother Paxwax," said the Reverend Joel, pressing their hands cordially. "This is Mrs. Brugg, my dear friends, and I'm proud of the opportunity of introducing her to you. A nobler example of a wife cannot be found; indeed, she is in all respects the very best woman in existence."

"A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband, Brother Brugg," said the Reverend Mr. Sneaksby, after having paid his respects to the lady.

"Pray sit down, gentlemen, and make yourselves quite at home," she exclaimed, assuming as hospitable a demeanour as it was in her nature to put on. "But, dear me! what is the matter with the gentleman's eye?" she demanded, fixing her looks upon Ichabod's damaged optic.

"It was an injury received by my pious brother when engaged in the Lord's service," Mr. Sneaksby hastened to observe. "For, behold, as we journeyed along the great highway which men call the Dover Road, we observed certain ungodly vessels employed in breaking stones. The discourse of these benighted sinners did reach our ears, and it shocked us sorely to perceive that for every one harmless word that fell from their lips, they gave utterance to a dozen oaths. Brother Paxwax, ever zealous in the good cause, did spur his ass into a trot and ride forward to remonstrate with those men of Belial. Whereupon one of them, more deeply influenced by Satan than all the rest, did rise from his seat on the stones, gird up his loins — "

"And bung up my eye with his fist," added Mr. Paxwax, by way of affording a suitable peroration for his superior's pathetic narrative.

"Alas! it is our lot to receive stripes and be beaten with rods in the good service," said Mr. Joel Brugg, turning up

the whites of his eyes and shaking his head solemnly. "But the divine grace and two leeches applied to-night, Brother Paxwax, will accomplish a cure. And now, my beloved friends, you will break bread with me, and then we will discourse upon the subject of your visit. My dear," he added, turning toward his wife, "what hast thou in the way of provender to offer unto these pious wayfarers?"

"A crust and a cup of cold water will suffice, dear Brother Brugg," said Mr. Sneaksby.

"Or anything that you may have provided for your own frugal meal, dear sister," observed Mr. Paxwax, addressing the lady; and at the same time he gave a sniff in order to ascertain whether there was any odour of roast meat in the house.

"Verily, and we would not insult your known virtues in respect to temperance, dear brethren, by placing before you the fleshpots of Egypt," said the Reverend Joel Brugg.

"Assuredly not," added his better half. "A morsel of cold mutton and a potato, with some water from a delicious spring in the neighbourhood, constitute our repast of this day, under the divine blessing; and to our humble board ye are truly welcome."

The Reverend Mr. Sneaksby's countenance became uncommonly blank for a moment, and Mr. Ichabod Paxwax made an awful face, as this frugal bill of fare was submitted to their consideration; but, instantly commanding their feelings, they laid the soothing unction to their souls that hospitable people very often speak modestly of the really handsome banquet which is forthcoming.

This happy delusion was, however, speedily dispelled by the entrance of the servant of all work to lay the cloth, and by the appearance of the cold mutton, the dish of potatoes, and a large jug of water. Mr. Sneaksby and Mr. Paxwax exchanged rapid glances expressive of unmitigated disgust; and even their last hope that something better than the limpid element from the spring might be forthcoming was totally destroyed when they saw the servant leave the room without receiving any instructions to fetch beer from the public-house.

The three eldest Masters Brugg and Miss Tabitha Brugg were now introduced to take their places at the dinner-table, they having the privilege of dining with their parents;

while a terrific stamping, screaming, and quarrelling in the room overhead showed pretty plainly that the more juvenile olive-branches of the Brugg genus were doomed to the ignominious captivity of the nursery.

Mr. Joel Brugg now said a grace which lasted for nearly a quarter of an hour, and during which every one around the table held his head almost down into his plate; but Mr. Paxwax was all the while thinking to himself that the provender was by no means commensurate with the thanksgiving. However, as he was exceedingly hungry, in spite of the devilled kidneys and the egg-flip, he managed to devour his share of the cold mutton, an example which was worthily followed by the Reverend Nathaniel Sneaksby. For the sake of appearances, they were likewise compelled to inflict the penalty of cold water upon their stomachs; and although Mr. Sneaksby gulped down his supply with as good a grace as he could assume, Mr. Paxwax could not possibly conceal his abhorrence for the primitive fluid.

The repast was ended, the cloth was removed, and the three boys had retired with Miss Tabitha, when the servant of all work, either in ignorance of her mistress's parsimonious intentions, or else in a little spirit of spite for numerous petty acts of tyranny inflicted upon her, exclaimed, in a loud tone, as she stood on the threshold of the door, " Please, ma'am, shall I put the gin on the table and bring up the hot water, as usual? "

Mr. Ichabod Paxwax actually bounded upon his chair in delight; and Mr. Sneaksby's mouth instantaneously began to water. These little circumstances were not lost upon Mr. and Mrs. Brugg, who exchanged rapid glances; for the domestic had committed a blunder which seriously compromised both their hospitality and their parsimony.

" Verily," said Mr. Paxwax, fearful lest a negative should be put upon the maid of all work's proposal, " I think that a leetle drop of something warm would — would — do my eye good," he added, no better excuse suggesting itself at the instant.

" Well, then," exclaimed Mrs. Brugg, sharply, and with a threatening look at the miserable servant, " if there does happen to be any gin in the house, we will break through an established rule and partake of a thimbleful each in

honour of our beloved guests. You may bring up the hot water."

"Oh, I know there's plenty of gin in the bottle, ma'am," said the domestic; "because I got it filled yesterday at the public, and you and master only drank half of it."

"Go and get the hot water, I say," almost shrieked forth Mrs. Brugg, darting terrific glances at the unfortunate maid.

There was no help for it, and the lady was accordingly compelled to open her cupboard and produce the bottle, much to the satisfaction of the New Lights. Glasses, hot water, sugar, and lemons were speedily placed upon the table, and having brewed himself a good jorum, Ichabod was himself again.

But how cordially in her heart did Mrs. Brugg hate and detest both that individual and Mr. Sneaksby when she saw them half-fill their tumblers with gin before they poured in the water; and at every sip they took she secretly wished that the steaming fluid might choke them. Indeed, being scarcely able to restrain her vexation, she was compelled to rush out into the kitchen and pour forth her envenomed feelings against the miserable servant; then, having thus far relieved herself, she hurried up into the nursery, where she found a vent for the remainder of her ill-humour by boxing the children's ears all around.

These two scenes of domestic life having passed off to her satisfaction, she returned to the parlour, but only to experience a horror and a consternation which, as she declared to some friend on a subsequent occasion, "almost proved the death of her," for, lo and behold! while she was employed in thrashing her olive-branches in the nursery, Mr. Brugg had actually sent out for more gin.

"Well, my dearly beloved friends," her husband began to say, the moment she thus returned to the room, — for he, prudent man, was anxious that she should catch the conciliatory words that he sent forth, in order to avert a storm, — "I have already told you that my wife is the very best woman in existence — Oh, here you are, my dear!" he exclaimed, suddenly interrupting himself, as if he did not know that she had been standing for half a minute upon the threshold. "I was only telling our Christian friends what an excellent wife you are to me, and how hospitable you always prove yourself toward your guests — Ahem!

my dear, will you take a leetle drop more gin? It is good for the stomach's sake, as the apostle said of wine."

"No, Mr. Brugg, I will not take another drop, and I beg that you will not either," exclaimed the irritated lady. "If these gentlemen choose to finish the bottle, let them, but you sha'n't help them, I can tell you;" and as she resumed her seat she darted spiteful looks at the Reverend Nathaniel Sneaksby and Mr. Ichabod Paxwax.

"My dear, my dear," said the Reverend Joel Brugg, in a tone of gentle remonstrance, "I hope you will not prove otherwise than — than — the very best woman in existence."

"Now you leave me alone and go on with your business, whatever it may be," exclaimed Mrs. Brugg, folding her arms and leaning back in the chair in a very determined manner, as if she were performing the part of sentinel upon the gin bottle, whereon her looks now remained fixed.

"Well, my Christian brethren," resumed Mr. Brugg, casting uneasy glances from time to time at his wife, "let us take into consideration the matter whereof ye are come to treat with me. And if my poor comprehension does not lead me astray, this visit on your part ariseth from certain observations which I made last week when I saw you in London."

"Yea, verily," responded Mr. Sneaksby; "for on that occasion thou didst hint at the possibility of the amalgamation of the pious Candelabrians with the blessed New Lights."

"And forasmuch as the Candelabrians are numerous and influential," said Mr. Brugg, "the New Lights should join us and become merged in our community."

"Nay, Brother Brugg," exclaimed Mr. Sneaksby, "the Candelabrians must become incorporated with the New Lights."

"Surely you are dreaming, Brother Sneaksby!" cried Mr. Brugg, becoming excited. "What, the Candelabrians resign that name which took me six months to think of and three more to fix the precise manner of spelling it? No, sir, no; it can't be done. Besides, when I founded the sect of Candelabrians, I meant to imply that they were the candles to light the world to the reading of the Scriptures."

"And pray what else are the New Lights?" demanded Mr. Sneaksby, likewise growing irritable.

"Ay, what are the New Lights, I should like to know?" exclaimed Mr. Paxwax.

"Shall I tell you?" said Mrs. Brugg, her lips white and quivering with the vixenish ill-humour that stirred her soul.

"If you choose, ma'am," responded the Reverend Nathaniel Sneaksby. "I should like to hear your opinion of the New Lights," he added, with a sarcastic emphasis.

"And so should I," said Mr. Paxwax. "Come, ma'am, out with it. What are we?"

"Humbugs, rank humbugs!" ejaculated Mrs. Brugg. "There, now I've told you, and my mind's relieved of a weight."

Thus speaking, the virago started from her chair, seized upon the gin bottle, the sugar, and the lemons, and proceeded to lock them all up in the cupboard. Then, bouncing to the room door, she threw it wide open, and stopping short upon the threshold, she turned toward her husband, exclaiming, "Now, Mr. Brugg, the sooner you get rid of them drunken New Lights, the better."

And again bouncing onward, she hastened along a passage leading to the kitchen, the door of which she banged behind her with a violence that shook the whole house to its foundation.

"Brother Paxwax," said Mr. Sneaksby, rising from his chair as soon as he had somewhat recovered from the stupefaction into which this extraordinary proceeding threw him, "we are in the tents of the ungodly, and it is time for us to be gone."

"Brother Sneaksby," responded Ichabod, likewise quitting his seat, "we cannot remain beneath this inhospitable fig-tree any longer — for the gin has disappeared," he added, in a low voice to himself.

"My dear Christian friends," said Mr. Brugg, imploringly, for he was afraid that the scene would be reported abroad to his discredit, "I humbly beseech you to pardon this treatment on the part of — of — the very best woman in existence."

"May the devil take such women — and you too, sir," cried the Reverend Nathaniel Sneaksby, unable to keep a rein upon his temper any longer. "I never saw such an accursed termagant in all my life."

"Nor I such a wretched henpecked old fool," cried Mr.

Paxwax, rushing out into the passage as he spoke and opening the front door, for fear that his remark might provoke Mr. Brugg to hurl the jug of hot water at his head. "Come along, Brother Sneaksby."

"I am coming, Brother Paxwax," said this reverend gentleman, who was not quite such a coward as his satellite; and, having flung a look of mingled ferocity and contempt upon the astounded Joe Brugg, he stalked majestically out of the house, leaving the front door wide open behind him.

Repairing to the public-house where they had put up their cattle, the two New Lights sat down in the parlour and began to console themselves with steaming jorums of gin punch for the insult and inhospitality which they had experienced at Brother Brugg's; and as the injuries which their feelings had sustained were manifold and deep, the amount of solace required was necessarily proportionate. But as this solace consisted in gin punch, in the same ratio that it lightened their hearts so did it lighten their heads; and when, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, they paid their bill and issued forth to mount their beasts, their pace was so unsteady that they mutually agreed there never was a place with such wretchedly loose and uneven pavement in all the world as Dartford.

Followed by the broad grins of the landlord, the hostler, and several hangers-on about the inn, the pious travellers commenced their journey homeward. But again had they to endure the persecution of the small boys, who, perceiving the inebriated condition of the two sanctimonious vessels, became perfectly uproarious in their glee and so extremely practical in their jokes that Mr. Sneaksby had two falls from his horse and Mr. Paxwax three from his ass before the limits of Dartford were reached. At length the urchins took leave of them, and they pursued their way without further molestation of that kind.

Presently a tremendous shower of rain began to fall, and the two leaders of the New Lights were speedily wet through to the skin. Vainly did they urge on their beasts to gain the nearest wayside public-house; the horse proved almost as obstinate as the donkey, and before a sheltering roof even appeared in sight, the reverend travellers were completely drenched. The water poured down from the broad

brims of their hats as if they were sluices opened for the occasion, and never did human beings look or feel more thoroughly miserable. At length they put up at a tavern, where they resolved to sup and pass the night; and with sorrow be it recorded that the Reverend Nathaniel Sneaksby and his friend, Mr. Ichabod Paxwax, were conveyed blind drunk to bed.

On the following morning they resumed their journey, the weather having cleared up; and with faces woefully elongated by reason of the headache which they experienced and the remorseful memories which filled their brains, they entered the metropolis at about midday. Proceeding straight to the stables where they had hired the mettled charger and the noble donkey, they felt a perfect relief when they thus got rid of their cattle; and hastening to Jermyn Street, they made such improvements in their toilet as rendered them fit to present themselves to the august synod of New Light elders assembled in the vestry-room of Salem to receive them.

The reader will scarcely require to be informed that they denounced in the strongest terms the inhospitable conduct of the Reverend Joel Brugg of Dartford; but in giving an account of their visit and its failure, neither Mr. Sneaksby nor Mr. Paxwax thought it at all necessary to state how tremendously tipsy they had both got.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE AFFLICTED MAIDEN

In the morning after the adventures at the masquerade, Pauline Clarendon awoke in a magnificently furnished bedchamber, the canopy overhanging the couch and the tops of the looking-glass frames being surmounted with ducal coronets.

For a few instants she was a prey to a wild bewilderment as she cast her eyes around; but almost immediately her ideas settled themselves into the proper places in her brain, and she recollected all that had occurred on the preceding evening, where she was now, and how she came thither. Then, as the fancied perfidy of Lord Florimel rose uppermost in her mind and dominated all her other thoughts, she buried her countenance in the pillow and gave way to an agonized ebullition of grief.

The flood of tears which she thus poured forth relieved her somewhat, and she had just dried the pearly drops upon her long lashes and her pale cheeks when the door opened gently and the brilliant Duchess of Devonshire entered the apartment.

"My dearest Pauline," she exclaimed, approaching the bed and taking the young lady's hand, "do tell me what has happened. Nothing has occurred to Octavia, I hope."

"Nothing, my generous friend, my noble benefactress," said Pauline. "But I must apologize most sincerely for seeking your abode last night, especially in a masquerade apparel and totally unattended."

"Do not say anything in the shape of an excuse, Pauline," interrupted the duchess, seating herself by the bedside, "but tell me what you will in the form of an explanation, as between friends. Something unpleasant has happened,

I am very sure, for your eyes are red with weeping, and, moreover, I am well aware that this masquerading adventure was no idle whim nor foolish freak on your part."

"Your surmise is correct, my kind friend," observed the young lady, subduing with a violent effort a fresh outbreak of her grief.

"I know you too well, understand your character too profoundly, and entertain too high an opinion of you, Pauline," said the duchess, "to imagine for a moment that you would venture alone to a masquerade without some strong and sufficient reason. Therefore, even if you should refuse me your confidence, I shall not think the less favourably of you."

"But I do not intend to refuse you my confidence," exclaimed Pauline. "I have received too many kindnesses at your hands not to regard you as the best friend I have in the world. When circumstances forced me to abandon my father's dwelling, you offered me a home, and a home has your Grace likewise provided for my unfortunate sister. Do not, therefore, imagine for a moment that I am unmindful of all you have done for me, or ungrateful for the many bounties of which I have been the recipient."

"I know that you are good and amiable and candid, my sweetest friend," said the duchess, "and on that account I have conceived a warm affection for you. Tell me if there be any way in which I can still serve you, and you may rely upon my zeal and readiness in your cause."

"First let me unbosom myself to your Grace," answered Pauline, "and then I may perhaps have a favour to implore at your hands."

Having thus spoken, the young lady took up some of her masquerading apparel which lay on a chair near the bed, and drawing forth a letter from the bosom of the dress, she handed it to the Duchess of Devonshire.

The contents of that billet were as follows:

"Lord Florimel is unfaithful to you. While affecting a complete reformation in his conduct, his private life is as profligate as ever; but his intrigues are carried on with a greater circumspection. To-morrow night he will be present at a masquerade at Covent Garden Theatre, disguised in a blue domino edged with a peculiar braiding and having a star of the same material on the top or crown of the hood.

The object of his visit to that scene is a new love intrigue, and you may convince yourself with your own eyes that such is the fact. The writer of this note is animated by no other desire than a sincere wish to prevent so much virtue, generous confidence, amiability, and candour being sacrificed to such profound hypocrisy, such foul deceit, and such unpardonable treachery; for by all those virtues are you characterized, and by all these faults is Lord Florimel distinguished.

"Well aware that you are so utterly unacquainted with all the arts of London dissipation as to be ignorant even how to proceed in order to procure at so short a notice a suitable disguise for the purpose which this letter naturally suggests, the writer has made the necessary arrangements at a respectable fancy-dress warehouse in London (the card of which is enclosed). The mistress of the establishment will have a chamber prepared for you to perform your toilet in the strictest privacy, and you can proceed thence in a hackney-coach to the theatre, which is at no great distance from the warehouse.

"One word more. The writer positively and earnestly enjoins you not to address a syllable of reproach to Lord Florimel within the walls of the theatre. You are even forbidden to accost him in a manner that may enable him to guess who you are. On the contrary, you must restrain your feelings and take time to deliberate upon the proper course to be subsequently pursued."

"I need not ask whether you received confirmation of the suspicions which this anonymous letter excited," said the Duchess of Devonshire, in a tone of the profoundest sympathy, when she had brought the perusal of the document to a close. "Alas! my dear friend, those tears which are falling from your eyes prove that the information was indeed too true."

"Too true, yes, too true!" murmured Pauline, the big drops chasing each other down her cheeks and falling upon her fair virginal bosom as she sat up in the bed gazing with a look of the deepest affliction upon Georgiana. "This letter, which is dated, as you perceive, the day before yesterday, and is addressed to me at your own villa near Aylesbury, I received early yesterday morning; and, confiding my poor sister to the care of the nurse, I came to

London. At the warehouse mentioned in the note I purchased that fancy dress, and having assumed it, I proceeded to the theatre. The masque in the blue domino with the curious braiding was already there; but at first it struck me that he was too tall for Gabriel. However, after a time I mustered up courage to accost him, and, reckless of the injunctions so emphatically expressed in the concluding portion of the note, I asked who he was. Then, doubtless believing me to be the fair one whom he expected to meet at that place, he instantaneously announced himself as Lord Florimel, — yes, and in such terms, too, that left no doubt as to his perfidy."

Pauline stopped short, her voice almost suffocated with the deep sobs which rent her bosom; and the duchess, throwing her arms around the young lady's neck, besought her to moderate her grief.

"Oh, my dearest, dearest friend," exclaimed Pauline in a more hurried and painful accent than before, "you cannot wonder if my heart be ready to burst with this woe which is too vast for it to contain. For I have loved your perfidious cousin, oh, I have loved him as never woman loved before; and when his own lips, breathing his name in my ear last night, confirmed the terrible suspicion that was already rending my soul, 'twas as if the knell of doom were reverberating within the living cells of my brain. Boundless was my affection, an illimitable flood of the tenderest feelings knowing no ebb, but ever gushing with the impulse of love's springtide. Conceive, then, how fearful is the anguish attendant upon the reaction of such a love as this, and how every nerve must quiver with an ineffable excruciation. And, oh, if it were not that a feeling of pride, nay, rather of proud indignation, now sustained me, I should sink beneath the weight of this blow so cruel, so undeserved, so unexpected."

And as Pauline gave utterance to this last sentence, her countenance, a moment before so pale, became suddenly flushed with a crimson hue, and the pearly tears which still stood upon her cheeks shone lustrous as the dewdrops on the pomegranate.

"Had Gabriel remained true to his plight and faithful to the solemn promises which he so profusely breathed in my ears," she continued, after a long pause, and now speak-

ing in a deep, low tone, " mine would have proved a lot fraught with a happiness which no power of language can describe. But, alas! " she exclaimed, in a voice denoting a sudden and irresistible self-abandonment to the full tide of bitter affliction, while she pressed her hand forcibly upon her bosom as if to silence the beatings of her heart, " alas! that dream of bliss has now been destroyed, the vision has fled, never to return."

" Oh, speak not thus despondingly, my dearest Pauline," said the generous-hearted Georgiana. " Let me become the peace-maker between you — "

" No, my kind friend, that may not be," interrupted the young lady, her voice and manner suddenly resuming their wonted firmness. " The bond which linked our hearts is for ever broken, and nothing can restore my confidence in Gabriel. I loved him not for his fortune nor his title: I loved him for himself alone, and after all that occurred last night, there is an end of everything between us. But I have not yet explained to your Grace the termination of my adventures, and how I came to seek the protection and security of your abode. On leaving the theatre, I remembered that I had not informed the people at the fancy-dress warehouse that I should return to lay aside my masquerading attire and resume my own garb; and I knew it was then too late to disturb the mistress of the shop. I accordingly entered a vehicle and ordered the coachman to drive me to a respectable hotel. But I was already the object of an infamous conspiracy set on foot by that royal profligate to whom my poor sister is indebted for her ruin," added Pauline, with exceeding bitterness of tone and great excitement of manner.

" What, the prince dared to persecute you? " ejaculated the Duchess of Devonshire, who, in spite of her own levity of conduct and deficiency of virtuous principle, was shocked at the idea which Pauline's words had engendered in her mind.

" Yes, his Royal Highness dared to make me the object of his tender persecution," responded the young lady, still speaking in a tone of bitterness; " and, in pursuance of the intrigues which he had set on foot to ensnare me, I was taken to the infamous dwelling of Mrs. Brace the milliner, instead of to a respectable hotel."

"Oh, this is really too bad!" exclaimed Georgiana, in no affected tone of indignation. "He ought to have remembered that you were the sister of one who was already too deeply afflicted on his account."

"The future sovereign of these realms knows neither generosity nor remorse," said Pauline, emphatically; "and despite of my representations, my reproaches, my entreaties, he would have ruined me — oh, my God! he would have ruined me," she cried, shuddering all over at the recollection of the tremendous danger in which she had been involved, "had not my screams brought assistance. I escaped from his arms, I escaped from the house, and throwing myself into a vehicle which happened to be passing through the square at the moment, I ordered the coachman to take me to a dwelling where I knew that friendship would afford me a secure asylum. And that dwelling is Devonshire House."

"Where you are truly welcome, Pauline," exclaimed the duchess, in a compassionating tone. "I am grieved that I was not at home last night when you arrived; for perhaps the solace which a sincere friend might have proffered would not have proved unwelcome. On returning from Lady Dewhurst's, at whose residence his Grace and myself had passed the evening, I was amazed to hear that you had come to pay Devonshire House so unexpected a visit, and I hurried hither to ascertain whether anything unpleasant had occurred. But you were sleeping so soundly — "

"Ah! my kind friend, I was exhausted in mind and body," exclaimed Pauline, the tears once more starting forth upon her long lashes; "and I slept profoundly, it is true, but my slumbers were haunted with hideous dreams. However, I must strive to combat against the sorrow which now weighs upon me like an almost intolerable burden, and beneath which all my energies, mental and physical, seem to bend."

"And you will not permit me to act as a peace-maker between my faithless cousin Florimel and yourself?" said the splendid Georgiana, in a tone which testified how cheerfully she would undertake the task of pacification.

"No, never!" replied Pauline, with a resolute manner. "A thousand, thousand times do I thank your Grace for this generous desire to interfere in my behalf; but, although I can never cease to love Lord Florimel, yet I dare not risk the utter and total wreck of my peace of mind by becoming

the wife of a man who makes solemn pledges so lightly and breaks them so easily. Your Grace will therefore confer an infinite favour upon me by pressing that point no more. And now, as I wish to withdraw myself altogether from the possibility of receiving either visits or letters from Lord Florimel, and as I am likewise anxious to seek that seclusion which may shield me against any fresh persecutions that his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales may possibly think fit to institute with regard to me, I purpose to retire with my unfortunate sister to some quiet neighbourhood, where I may pass my time in ministering to the cure of her wounded spirit and surrounding her with consolations when the restoration of her intellect will render such solace needful."

"And in what manner, my dear Pauline," asked the duchess, "can I assist your views in this respect?"

"By adding pecuniary succour to the generous aid your Grace has already afforded me," was the response. "I will not apply to my father; but I do not hesitate to solicit this boon at your hands, because I feel so much confidence in your friendship —"

"Enough, my dear Pauline," interposed the Duchess of Devonshire. "If you were to act otherwise than in this spirit of affectionate reliance, I should have been deeply grieved. And now tell me where you would like to fix your abode?"

"Previously to my father's removal to Cavendish Square," answered Pauline, "we resided in a pretty little house on a terrace called Paradise Villas, in the Edgeware Road. For upwards of eighteen months did we dwell there; and I feel some secret and unaccountable impulse urging me to return to that once happy home. Both the prince and Lord Florimel are aware that we once resided there; but they would never think of seeking me in my former abode. It is consequently my intention to repair thither presently and ascertain if the house which we lately occupied is still to let."

"Indeed, my dear Pauline, you shall not take that trouble upon yourself," exclaimed Georgiana. "You shall repose a few hours longer, for you are doubtless fatigued in body as well as in mind, and your breakfast shall be sent up to you in a few minutes. At midday you shall accompany me in the carriage to see all that I may have done for

you in the meantime, and then you shall hasten to Aylesbury to fetch Octavia."

Having thus spoken, the good-hearted duchess kissed Pauline's cheek with a pure sisterly affection, and then hurried from the room to escape the expressions of gratitude which the young lady, with tears streaming down her countenance, began to utter, in a voice broken by emotions.

In about a quarter of an hour a female servant made her appearance with a silver tray covered with the materials for an excellent breakfast; but poor Pauline had no appetite for any of the luxuries thus provided. Having partaken, however, of a cup of chocolate, she requested writing materials to be brought to her; and she also desired that a messenger might be sent to the fancy-dress warehouse to procure the apparel which she had left there on the preceding evening. These instructions were complied with; and having risen from the sumptuous couch and performed her toilet, Pauline sat down to pen a few lines to Lord Florimel.

Then, as she pondered, painfully pondered, upon the style which she ought to adopt, the words uttered by the Gipsy masque at the theatre on the preceding evening recurred to her memory, and she slowly repeated them over to herself:

"When a virtuous woman's dignity is offended by a faithless lover, she does not write a long letter of mingled complaint, upbraiding, and reproach; but she pens a few laconic words, commanding him to seek her presence no more, and leaving him to calculate and weigh all the motives which have suggested a proceeding at once so dignified and imperious."

And, her mind yielding to the bias of these suggestions, she indited a letter in the spirit thereof; but the precise nature of its contents will be explained hereafter.

Securing the billet in the bosom of her dress, to be posted only when her removal into her contemplated seclusion should have taken place, Pauline anxiously awaited the return of the duchess. Punctual to her promise, the beautiful and generous-hearted Georgiana repaired to the young lady's chamber, ready apparelled in her carriage dress; and, the vehicle being in attendance, they issued forth together.

On being seated in the carriage, the duchess ordered the coachman to drive to Paradise Villas, Edgeware Road;

then, as the vehicle rolled away from Devonshire House, she turned with an arch smile toward Pauline, observing, "The three hours which have elapsed since I left you, my dear friend, have not been wasted, as you shall presently see. His Grace, whom I made acquainted with the purpose which I entertained on your behalf, instantaneously despatched his agent to take the business in hand, and considerable progress is no doubt already made in the matter."

Pauline could only express her gratitude by tears, for her feelings were too deeply touched to allow the utterance of words. The duchess continued to discourse with her in the kindest manner, and in a short time the carriage stopped in front of Paradise Villas. From the window did Pauline cast her looks at the house where she had spent so many happy days, the house in which she had first become acquainted with Florimel, the house, too, where the Prince of Wales, under the name of Mr. Harley, had poured his insidious love-tales into the ears of her sister. There was much of mingled bitterness and pleasure in the reminiscences thus suddenly called up in the young lady's mind; but, even if the latter feeling did not altogether predominate, there was, nevertheless, a melancholy charm in the prospect of returning to an abode she had once loved and every feature of which was so familiar to her recollection.

On alighting from the carriage, the duchess and Pauline entered the house, the door of which was standing open; and in the front parlour they found two respectable-looking elderly gentlemen, both of whom saluted Georgiana with the profoundest respect. One of them was the Duke of Devonshire's agent, and the other his solicitor; and in this capacity were they forthwith introduced to Pauline.

But before there was leisure to exchange a word upon matters of business, a wagon, laden with furniture, stopped in front of the house; and Pauline, now fully comprehending all the generous zeal which Georgiana had exercised in her behalf, threw herself upon that noble lady's bosom and wept plenteously. The agent and the attorney were much moved by this pathetic scene, and when that first ebullition of feeling was expended, Pauline was enabled to bestow her attention to the men of business.

In a few words the agent informed her that, immediately upon receiving the duke's instructions, at nine o'clock that

morning, he had ascertained who was the proprietor of the house in question; and, being fortunate enough to find that individual at home, the projected transaction was speedily arranged between them. In fine, the house had been purchased in the name of Miss Pauline Clarendon; and the duke's attorney had been called in to assist in the drawing up of a provisional deed, making over the property to the young lady, until the more formal and elaborate conveyance could be effected. In the meantime the duke's upholsterer had received certain instructions, the result of which was the arrival of the wagon laden with furniture, and attended by several men to put down the carpets and fit up the entire premises as promptly as many hands could work and money could inspire them with the requisite activity.

Vain were it to attempt to describe the mingled joy and gratitude of Pauline on receiving all these munificent proofs of the friendship entertained for her by the Duchess of Devonshire. Suffice it to say that if her words fell short in expressing her feelings, her looks made up for the deficiency. And the noble lady, the authoress of this generous work, what were her emotions? Oh, never until then had she experienced so full and profound an appreciation of the value of riches as a means to do good; and many a frailty, many an error, many a fault, ay, and much want of virtuous principle in the general routine of her existence, were atoned for by the fostering succour thus afforded to an otherwise friendless, persecuted, and unhappy maiden.

On returning to Devonshire House, Pauline partook of luncheon with her kind-hearted friend; and, the duke's travelling-carriage having been ordered in the meantime, the young lady took an affectionate leave of the duchess and set out for the villa near Aylesbury. There her preparations for departure were soon made; and Octavia, whose aberration of intellect had within the last few days assumed the form of a harmless childishness, was delighted when she comprehended that she was to take a ride in the travelling-carriage. The nurse who had all along attended upon the unfortunate victim of royal lust accompanied the sisters to their new home, or rather, on this return to their former one; and it was about eleven o'clock at night when the party reached Paradise Villas in the Edgeware Road.

Pauline had entertained some apprehensions relative to

the effect which this removal to a familiar scene might produce upon her sister; and during the journey thither from the vicinage of Aylesbury she had more than once regretted her resolution to take up her future abode in that house where Octavia had first met the prince. But those alarms proved unfounded, and, indeed, rather experienced an opposite result; for on entering her former home, Octavia appeared to recognize it, changed though it were by the handsome furniture which now constituted its comfort and its tasteful elegance, and the unfortunate young lady, throwing herself upon Pauline's bosom, burst into a flood of tears.

From that day forth a gradual improvement was visible in the mental condition of Octavia Clarendon.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE LAWYER AND HIS MYSTERIOUS VISITRESS

THE reader will observe it was on the day following the masquerade at Covent Garden Theatre that the adventures of Mr. Sneaksby and Ichabod Paxwax occurred, on the one hand, and that the incidents chronicled in the preceding chapter took place on the other. It was likewise on this same day, and at about the hour of noon, that a young female, neatly apparelled and enveloped in a cloak, alighted from a hackney-coach at the entrance to Featherstone Buildings, Holborn.

Passing into that place, she examined the brass plates on the doors and the inscriptions on the doorposts, until her eyes encountered the name of Mr. Rigden painted on one of the latter; and forthwith entering the clerk's office, she inquired if she could see the attorney himself. The reply was in the affirmative, and her name was requested. This, however, she refused to give, observing that Mr. Rigden did not know her, but that her business was of considerable importance. Finally, after one of the clerks had communicated with his master, the young woman was introduced to that gentleman's private office.

" Be seated," said Mr. Rigden, taking a rapid but searching survey of the visitress, as if he sought to penetrate into the nature of her business even before she had begun to explain it; and he saw before him a very pretty female, almost a girl, of short stature, and whose countenance wore an air of deep decision and firmness of purpose.

In obedience to his invitation, she took a chair; then, fixing her eyes for a few moments upon Mr. Rigden's features, she scrutinized them in her turn, as if to assure herself that he was a man to whom she might confide some purpose

which she had in view. Rapid and even furtive as that survey was, Mr. Rigden did not fail to notice it; and the profoundly experienced man of business full well comprehended its meaning and purport. Imagining, therefore, that the mystery attendant upon the visitress and the very nature of that scrutinizing look which she had fixed upon him augured the development of an affair of more than usual importance, he said a few words to encourage her to open the requisite explanations.

"May I consider, sir," said the young woman, "that if nothing should come of the discourse which we may presently have together, the subject of that conversation shall remain a profound secret?"

"Unless you divulge to me any crime the punishment of which is demanded by the laws of society," responded the wary solicitor, "I shall, as a matter of course, look upon the object of your visit as strictly confidential."

The young woman did not appear quite satisfied with this answer; and she reflected profoundly for upwards of a minute, during which Mr. Rigden took snuff with an air of calm indifference.

"If you feel interested, sir, in the claims or pretensions of a particular client," the girl at length said, "would you not be grateful to any one who could assist you in the furtherance of that client's interest?"

"Most assuredly," answered the lawyer. Then, in a measured and significant tone, he added, "I should likewise know how to reward the individual rendering such succour."

"But if this succour were of somewhat an equivocal character?" said the young woman, inquiringly.

"There are many things which in the ordinary affairs of life deserve the name of subterfuges, equivocations, unjust dealings, and the taking of improper advantages, but which come within the legitimate course of procedure in legal matters."

And having given this reply, which, though guarded and cautious, was still encouraging, the attorney took another pinch of snuff.

"The production or the suppression of a document in a lawsuit is frequently attended with the most important results, I believe?" said the young woman, evidently acquir-

ing confidence, and yet feeling her way with the utmost care.

"As a matter of course," exclaimed Mr. Rigden; "and it is the province of the lawyer to avail himself of all those advantages which circumstances may throw in his way. Nor must he be overnice in looking into the source whence those advantages emanate."

Again the girl reflected deeply for a few moments, and again did Mr. Rigden regale his nostrils with snuff.

"Suppose, sir," resumed the strange visitress, "that you were interested for a client whose cause depended upon the production of certain papers on the part of his opponent, and suppose some one had the power of rendering it impossible for that opponent to produce these necessary papers? Would you countenance this some one in such a line of conduct?"

"I have yet to learn," said Mr. Rigden, "that it is a crime, or a dishonour, or even an impropriety for an attorney to buy off a hostile witness or keep him out of the way, if possible. On the contrary, this is done every day, and enters into the widely ramified proceedings of legitimate lawchicanery. And again, if certain papers, constituting in themselves important testimony, are to be purchased either for production or suppression, I do not think that the king's attorney-general would hesitate to enter into such a transaction; and what the attorney-general would do, a humble individual such as Mr. Rigden need not blush to accomplish."

"In plain terms, then," said the girl, now fixing her eyes with a keen significance upon the lawyer, "you are prepared to enter into a transaction which is quite safe and secure and will no doubt put a large sum of money into your pocket?"

"And into yours also, eh?" observed Mr. Rigden, suffering his cold and almost stern features to relax for a moment into a smile.

"No, sir, not a farthing," exclaimed the young woman, with impassioned vehemence.

"How nothing?" demanded the attorney, in astonishment.

"Because my motives are not mercenary, sir," was the immediate response. "And on that point I beg to decline any explanation whatsoever."

"Then if your motives be not mercenary, there is assuredly greater confidence to be placed in you," said the lawyer, with a view of encouraging his visitress to proceed. "Come, we are alone, in a place where no eavesdropper can overhear what passes between us, and you have already felt your way with sufficient precaution. Do you understand me?"

"Yes," was the reply; "and I will no longer hesitate to explain the object of my presence here. You have a client, Mr. Rigden, who believes that he has certain claims upon the title and estates now in the enjoyment of Lord Florimel?"

"Exactly so," said the attorney. "But how came you with this information?"

"That is my business," observed the young woman, laconically. "It is true, then, that you have such a client; and you are doubtless anxious to put him in possession of all that he claims?"

"Such is the aim of every attorney who enjoys the confidence of his client," returned Mr. Rigden, taking snuff consequentially.

"And an affair of such importance would not only prove most lucrative, but also of great advantage to your professional reputation?" continued the girl.

"I shall not affect any fastidiousness by denying those propositions," said the lawyer, marvelling at the acuteness of so young a creature in probing, as it were, the very thoughts which he was revolving in his mind at the moment.

"But in order to ensure the success of your client," she proceeded, "it is necessary that Lord Florimel should be unable to produce certain documents."

"Such is the fact," replied Mr. Rigden, now becoming more deeply interested than ever in the present discourse.

"And if any one were to place those deeds in your hands," said the girl, in a low, measured, and solemn tone, "would you send them back to Lord Florimel with a letter informing him how you became possessed of them? In a word, what would you do with them?"

Mr. Rigden took snuff and gazed intently upon the young woman, in order to read in her countenance all that was passing in her mind. Then, satisfied with the result of a scrutiny from which she did not wince, he said, in a voice as low, measured, and solemn as her own had just been,

" If I had those documents in my possession, I should keep them."

" And would you know, at a glance, if they were placed before you, whether they were the right ones or not? " demanded the girl, her eyes flaming up with the lustre of joy and triumph as that response which the lawyer gave fell upon her ears.

" Yes, at a glance," he immediately rejoined.

" Then are these the documents your client requires? " she exclaimed, rising from her seat and producing from beneath her cloak a bundle of parchments and other deeds tied around with red tape.

Mr. Rigden, forgetting his usual cold tranquillity of manner, greedily extended his hands to grasp the papers; but the young woman made an imperious motion for him to desist. She then opened the parcel and allowed him to peruse the first lines of the principal document, observing, at the same time, " If they be not the deeds which you require, I shall not leave them with you."

" But they are, they are! " exclaimed Mr. Rigden, becoming perfectly excited with joy; for the prospects of a lucrative suit and the fame of conducting such a cause to a successful issue, together with other considerations, instantaneously sprang up in his imagination.

" And you will make use of those papers to forward the views of your client and ruin Lord Florimel? " said the girl, her countenance becoming ghastly pale and almost hideous with the workings of evil passions in her bosom, so that the keen-sighted attorney had now no difficulty in fathoming the motive which was instigating her in the present proceeding.

" What guarantee can you give me that the present transaction will remain enveloped in eternal secrecy? " asked the lawyer. " Remember, you are a stranger to me, you have not even told me who you are nor whence you come, and you may have taken this step in a moment of spite — "

" Oh, I can give you the best guarantee which it is in mortal power to afford," exclaimed the young girl, her stature appearing to become more elevated as she drew herself up in the sublimity of her wrath and her triumph, while her countenance grew animated with a supernal lustre, as if it caught the reflection of those flames which were

burning in the hell of her heart. "And that guarantee," she continued, in the exalted tone of a pythoness dealing forth terrible oracles, "is the eternal, the undying, the unquenchable vengeance of an outraged woman. There, sir, now you have learned my secret, now you are acquainted with my motive, and now also you read the whole history of my shame. It was not my intention to have revealed to you all this; but you demanded a guarantee, and I give you one. For, as truly as there is a God above us and a Satan in the realms beneath us, so surely will my vengeance endure until the lips which are giving utterance to these words shall be silenced by the cold hand of death, and until the heart which cherishes the fervid hope of crushing a wretch down unto the very dust shall cease to beat in the silent tomb. Think you, then, that I will betray you? Think you that I shall prove a traitress to myself?"

"No, I do not entertain such a thought, now that you have spoken thus candidly," said Mr. Rigden. "I accept the guarantee, and I promise to make a good use of the documents," he added, in a significant tone. "But will you not accept any reward?"

"Not a farthing," exclaimed the girl, proudly. "Do you not know a woman's mind better than to make her such a proposal, after all I have just said to you? But it is useless to waste more time upon that point; for few are the beings of your sex who do appreciate the extent of virtue, love, and self-sacrifice of which a woman is capable, nor, on the other hand, comprehend the nature of the vengeance which she craves when outraged. Farewell, sir."

With these words, the strange visitress took her departure, leaving Mr. Rigden as much amazed at her extraordinary character and proceedings as he was rejoiced at the object and result of the interview.

END OF VOLUME III.

PR
5221
R35M9
1860
v.3

Reynolds, George William
MacArthur
The mysteries of the Court
of London

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY